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THE MEKONG PROJECT.

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REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE MEKONG PROJECT

by

LE-THI-TUYET

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1972

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Chairman of Examining Committee

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Table of Contents

Introduction

I.- Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the concept of regional cooperation and examine the preconditions and requirements for its success. The case in point is the Committee for Coordination of Investigation of the Lower Mekong Basin - generally known as the Mekong Committee - created in 1957 under the auspices of the United Nations. It is composed of representatives of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam.

In spite of the war and diplomatic difficulties in this region, the Mekong Committee has met regularly and even developed the "Mekong Spirit," reflecting a willingness to cooperate regardless of political contingencies. Moreover, the Mekong Committee has also achieved some positive and concrete results. By January 1972, eight Mekong tributary projects were completed or in operation, and twice that number were under investigation or construction. The operational resources of the Committee reached the total of some $215 million contributed by twenty-five countries, a dozen UN agencies and several private foundations.

It should be noted, however, that the Lower Mekong Project, as a case study in regional cooperation, is unique in several aspects. First, unlike most international river developments (Indus between India and Pakistan, the Jordan River in the Middle East, and Lauca between Bolivia and Chile, for example) the Mekong Project did not stem from

the riparians' competing interests or conflicts in its water use.

Second, the initiative to develop the Mekong river - "because it was there," as one riparian official put it - did not belong to the riparian governments themselves but to the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE).

Third, the United Nations direct involvement in the Mekong Project made it different from all other international river developments, and also distinguished the nature of the Mekong cooperation from other Southeast Asian regional co-operations, such as MAPHILINDO, ASA, or ASEAN, which are truly "indigenous."

Unquestionably, these peculiar factors account for the relative success of the Mekong Project. However, they offer only a partial explanation. The UN ECAFE has played an influential and helpful role in the Project, but ECAFE is not a blue-print for regional cooperation. Otherwise one would not understand the lack of progress in the Asian Highway Project which has also been undertaken under the auspices of ECAFE.

As for the first point, it is true that the Mekong Project was not born out of the riparians' claims and conflicts in its water use, but, as the UN Panel of Experts made clear in its report on Integrated River Basin Development, "even in the best of circumstances joint use of international waters can give rise to ill feeling and political

tension."[1] Effectively, the integrated development of the Mekong river basin did raise many thorny problems and difficulties among riparian members. The absence of riparian conflicts in water use before the Mekong Project was undertaken did not guarantee an automatic and smooth cooperation after the Project started. On the contrary, "in view of the member states that have only recently started to handle their own affairs," as correctly observed by the UN Panel of Experts, "the atmosphere in many cases is one of mutual distrust and hostility, which obviously retards and often precludes any real progress in cooperation."[2]

The main effort of this study is to look into those factors which are other than these three peculiarities and determine the success of Mekong regional cooperation, and draw some general conclusions from my analysis of this unique case.

II.- Significance of Regional Cooperation in the Postwar World

Since the end of World War II attempts at international regional cooperation and integration constitute one of the constant and significant trends in international relations. Over one hundred regional organizations were founded in the

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1. Integrated River Basin Development, Report of a Panel of Experts, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, 1970, Rev. ed., E/3066/Rev.1, p. 33.

2. Ibid.

past twenty-five years. Some were set up for immediate purposes of reconstruction and development of the region, such as the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC, 1948-1960) with the aid of the US Marshall Plan in postwar Europ, and the Anglo-American Commission in the Caribbean (1942-1961).[1] Others were particularly interested in free trade, like the European Free Trade Association, the Latin American Free Trade, and the West African Customs Union.

Regional arrangements were also created for the purposes of what has been called "political order-building,"[2] such as the Arab League, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and to some extent the British Commonwealth.

Finally, there were regional organizations which aimed at regional economic integration, such as the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Community (EEC), the Central American Common Market and the East African Community.

In addition to those inter-governmental bodies, we should add the United Nations regional economic commissions in Europe, Africa, Latin America,and Asia and the Far East.

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1. In 1946, France and the Netherlands joined the Commission.

2. Stoessinger, John G., The Might of Nations, New York: Random House, 1972, pp. 302-332.

They were established to help promote economic reconstruction, development and cooperation among the countries in respective regions.

In Asia and the Pacific we do not find an inclusive regional organization comparable to the OEEC in Europe, the OAS in Latin America, or the OAU in Africa. As a result of this, the UN regional economic commission for Asia and the Far EAst (ECAFE) was for quite some time the only regional forum where Asian governmental officials could discuss regional needs and problems. Over the years ECAFE has played a positive role in region-building in providing a pattern of consultation for Asian countries, developing a sense of regional consciousness, and defining regional goals. Subsequently, ECAFE was very effective in sponsoring numerous regional arrangements for economic cooperation on a small or broad regional basis, such as the Mekong Project (1957), the Asian Institute for Econcomic Development and Planning (1964), and the Asian Highway (1965).

In the broader political context and outside the UN framework several diplomatic attempts were made to promote regional cooperation among Asian countries. The Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947 was the first Asian cooperative effort but did not lead to a regional organization.

In 1950, for the first time the Commonwealth foreign ministers met on Asian soil, in Colombo, and instituted the "Colombo Plan," which was a proposed program for technical assistance to South and Southeast Asia and an informal but

highly valued framework for the negotiation and coordination of economic aid.

In 1954, the Manila Conference led to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) which was designed to deter overt Communist aggression in this area. However, this regional scheme of cooperation for security had only three Asian states, or one third of its membership.

The following year the Bandung Conference, from April 18 to 24, 1955, strongly endorsed the principles of cultural, economic and political cooperation among Asians and Africans but failed to carry them beyond mere recommendations. As Mr. Kitamura correctly observed:

> "...Asian nations were not yet prepared even to agree on the inter-country distribution of the foreign assistance fund for Asia (Stassen Plan) which perhaps had the potential of developing into a kind of Asian Marshall Plan: Asia was not ripe for its own Organization of European Economic Cooperation."[1]

However, Communist China's Five Principles of 1/ mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, 2/ non-aggression, 3/ non-interference in each other's domestic affairs, 4/ mutual benefit and equality and 5/ peaceful coexistence later became the fundamental premises on which Asian regional cooperation is actually based.

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1. Hiroshi Kitamura, "Regional Cooperation as Seen from ECAFE," a paper presented at the SEADAG Regional Development Panel Seminar held at the Asia House, New York, on December 10-11, 1971.

If it was difficult and impossible to set up an inclusive "Pan-Asian" regional organization, smaller experiments of regional cooperation among small countries of Southeast Asia did not succeed either. In 1961, the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) was launched by Malaya, the Philippines and Thailand for the purpose of establishing a "firm foundation for common action to further economic and social progress in Southeast Asia." Two years later ASA became inoperative when the Federation of Malaysia was proclaimed in 1963. The Philippines, which laid claim to some territory on Borneo that was part of the new Federation, refused to extend recognition.

At about the same time (1962-1963) a second experiment of Southeast Asian regional cooperation was tried. The new organization was named MAPHILINDO - somewhat similar to the Arab League. It included Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia and aimed "to restore and strengthen the historic unity and common heritage of the Malay peoples and draw them into closer political, economic and cultural relations."[1] The experience was stillborn because of President Sukarno's policy of "Konfrontasi" against Malaysia.

In sum, the first two decades after World War II witnessed the dismal fate of Asian regional cooperation, on a

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1. Official Manila Document, reproduced in The Dimensions of Conflict in Southeast Asia by Gordon, Bernard K., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966, p. 189.

large or small scale. On the whole, the record showed that during that period many regional arrangements were organized for diverse purposes but that very few of them survived and little regional cooperation materialized. There were two exceptions, however: the ECAFE-sponsored regional activities and the Colombo Plan (1950) for technical assistance in the region, which did achieve a certain degree of success in fostering regional cooperation for economic purposes.

The year 1966 marked a turning point in Asian regional cooperation. ECAFE spawned a long and diverse roster of new agencies. It included the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 1966), the Asian Industrial Development Council (1966), the Asian International Trade Fairs (1966), the Typhoon Committee (1968), the Asian Coconut Committee (1969), the Asian Statistical Institute (1970), the Southeast Asia Iron and Steel Institute (1971) and the Pepper Community (1971). ECAFE also organizaed several regional seminars and meetings, such as the Conference of Asian Planners, the Asian Population Conference, and the Ministerial Conference of Asian Economic Cooperation, which has since become the Council of Asian Ministers.

Outside ECAFE intense and active regional moves were notable, and productive as well. In April 1966, the Japanese government, for the first time after World War II, sponsored an international meeting, the nine-nation Ministerial Conference for the Economic Development of Southeast Asia (EDSEA), which has continued to meet each year to discuss general

problems of economic development. It was consultative rather than operational.

In June of the same year the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC) was formed in Seoul. Unlike EDSEA the new Asian-wide regional organization was politically motivated, especially anti-Communist China directed. It is doubtful that this regional defense arrangement could survive in the seventies.

In May 1970, the Djakarta Conference on Cambodia gathered twelve nations together, from Japan to New-Zealand. It was apprarently an impressive show of regional conciousness and concern. But then, the Djakarta Conference had no on-going machinery and the recommendations remained a dead letter.

On the other hand, subregional schemes of cooperation among small countries of Southeast Asia seemed to be developing more realistic, manageable and promising in the late sixties. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), started in 1965, provided a prototype for regional functional cooperation for educational purposes. Among many things SEAMEO has made it possible for hundreds of teachers and scholars of Southeast Asia to travel and study in their region, instead of going to their former colonial European countries or the United States.

Another indigenous regional body was the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) among Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. It could be considered as the only successful,

though modest, institutional expression of Muslim solidarity and cooperation in Southwest Asia.

Last, but not least, was the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) formed in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore. Although limited in membership, ASEAN was an "all-purpose" subregional organization conceived to bring about "peace and stability" and "progress and prosperity" in the Southeast Asian region. While ASEAN's tangible results remain to be seen, the five-nation leaders are firmly committed to regional cooperation which, as Foreign Minister Thanat of Thailand put it, "represents a culmination of thoughts that have been weighed against the vicissitudes of international life,"[1] meaning the US disengagement in Vietnam, the new great-power game and multipolarity in Asia. Regional cooperation will probably dominate Asian politics in the 1970's.

Research and analysis of regional arrangements have produced a significant number of integrationist theories. The best known are the federalist approach, the functionalist spill-over theory pioneered by Mitrany and subsequently revised by Haas and Schmitter, and the transactional model developed by Karl Deustch and the Princeton group. These theories, primarily drawn from the European Community

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1. Thailand Economic & Industrial Review, 1968, a Supplement of the Bangkok Post, Section on "Regional Development," p. 103.

experiences, are also constructed for Africa, Asia and Latin America.

On the other hand, no theoretical work has been done on regional cooperation even though this approach is increasingly advocated and sought in regional politics, especially by developing states. Regionalist thinkers generally consider the study of regional cooperation as part of the study of regional integration. But as Haas conceded, regional cooperation can be a separate field of interest.[1]

However, the latter approach has received little attention and emphasis among scholars and students of International Relations. There are only two case studies dealing directly with regional cooperation, viewed as a political phenomenon separate and different from regional integration.

The first study, Patterns of International Cooperation in the Caribbeans, 1942-1969, is written by Herbert Cockran and deals with the different, and evolutionary patterns of regional cooperation in the Carribean islands, from 1942 to 1969. These were devised to cope with changing economic conditions and political situations of those countries from colonialism to independence, from war time to reconstruction and development. The second book, Toward Disengagement in Asia: A Strategy for American Foreign Policy by Bernard

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1. Haas, Ernst B., "The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pretheoring," International Organization, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, Autumn 1970, p. 611.

Gordon focused on the experience of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) among Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines.

There are a few articles on Southeast Asian regional cooperation,[1] but they are mostly descriptive, advocative, or speculative. However, we must single out one thoughtful essay on regionalism written by Werner Levi in his book entitled The Challenge of World Politics in South and Southeast Asia. The author was concerned with the "stimuli and motivations," the benefits and difficulties of regional cooperation in South and Southeast Asia in general terms.

III.- Reasons for the Study of Regional Cooperation

In this study we give regional cooperation a separate field of interest. There are many reasons for this distinction, as illustrated by Cockran's, Gordon's and Levi's works. First, the question of sovereignty of states is treated differently in regional integration and regional cooperation. The study of regional integration, as expounded by Ernest Haas, "is concerned with explaining how and why states cease to be wholly sovereign, how and why they voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbors so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflict between themselves."[2]

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1. See bibliography attached.

2. Haas, Ernst B., art. cit. in International Organization, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, Autumn 1970, p. 610.

In contrast, most newly independent nations joined in regional organizations not to lose their sovereignty but, on the contrary, to gain international recognition and enhance their national status in the world community, as pointed out by Levi:

> "Regionalism was acceptable only...if somehow it could be rationalized as fortifying sovereignty. It seemed a case of necessity for many Asian statesmen when they expressed the hope that regionalism might strengthen their national independence.."[1]

Second, related to this issue of sovereignty regional integration asks national political leaders "to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities to a new center whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states."[2] Regional cooperation, on the contrary, must "allay fears that it might limit freedom of action"[3] of cooperating members. Nehru was reported to declare in 1949 that there "can only be the cooperation of independent nations without the least commitment of one to the other," and as far as the structure of regional cooperation was concerned, there would be"no binding covenant in it, and this will largely be an organization for the

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1. Levi, Werner, The Challenge of World Politics in South and Southeast Asia, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968, p. 52.
2. Haas, E.B., **Beyond the Nation State**,Stanford Univ.Press,1964.
3. Levi, op. cit., p. 52.

consultation and cooperation that naturally flow from common interests."[1]

Third, the concept of regional cooperation is considered as a process and/or a terminal situation which may be a "political community," a "security community," or a "federal union." The concept of regional cooperation is regarded as a process and/or a "means" to enhance security posture, to promote economic development, to understand and solve common regional needs and problems. In the first case, a political community requires widespread support and participation including not only policy-makers but also parliamentarians, interest groups, intellectual elites, non-governmental associations, to name a few. In the second case, the regional cooperation process involves only governmental officials and structures.

Fourth, the study of regional integration was originally and mainly concerned with the built-in process of integration, of which the "spill-over" and "communications" theories were an illustration. It failed to take into account the external factors of regional integration. Karl Kaiser underscored this gap at the American Political Science Association meeting five years ago, in September 1967:

> "The theory explains, generalizes about, or predicts regional integration almost exclusively on the basis of processes

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1. Quoted in Levi, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

> and factors internal to the region under consideration. When theory considers phenomena outside the region, they usually appear as residual categories which are left insufficiently examined and about which we know little. Moreover, theory has remained relatively silent about the role of superpowers."[1]

Kaiser acknowledged that there were a few attempts to deal with the outside world, such as Etzioni's Political Unification and Nye's concept of "catalyst", but these contributions remained marginal and not explicitly incorporated into any set of theoretical propositions. As of today this conundrum is still left ill defined and unresolved in the study of regional integration.

On the contrary, Cockran's, Gordon's and Levi's case studies showed that the exogeneous variable was the most salient factor weighing on the fate of regional cooperation. The roles of great powers, the changes in contextual background, a shift in international relations or balance of power bore a vital impact on the formation, planning and development of a regional cooperation process. In his study of the Caribbean regional cooperation Cockran clearly demonstrated that the regional cooperation process could include several patterns of cooperation which evolved in an effort to keep pace with the changing international environment and political status of the countries concerned. The

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1. Kaiser, Karl, "The Interactions of Regional Subsystems: Some Preliminary Notes on Recurrent Patterns and the the Role of Superpowers," World Politics, Vol. XXI, No. 1, October 1968, p. 84.

patterns of Caribbean cooperation involved successively the Caribbean Commission (1942-1961) among the Great Powers of the United States, Great Britain, France and Holland, the Caribbean Organization (1961-1965) composed of Caribbean countries themselves, and lastly the Corporacion de Desarollo Economico del Caribe, or CODECA, (1965-1969), which responded to the evolution of Caribbean islands toward self-determination and self-assertiveness.

Both Gordon and Levi agreed that regional cooperation in Asia was necessitated by the fear of great power dominance, in particular mainland China, in this region after 1949. Levi saw in Asian regional cooperation a movement of "independence from the Western nations and...from China."[1] Gordon stressed the role of "outside support," namely the United States, as "the most important" incentive for Asian regional cooperation and its development.[2] In any case, the point is that the interactions between the dominant international political system and the regional or subregional system were primordial and critical in the study of regional cooperation, even sometimes prevailing over its internal factors.

Lastly, because of the foregoing differences between regional integration and regional cooperation evaluation of the success of regional cooperation must also be different

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1. Levi, Werner, op. cit., p. 52.

2. Gordon, Bernard K., op. cit., p. 87.

from that of regional integration, as pointed out by Ernst Haas himself:

> "Judgments as to whether cooperation is 'successful' must be based on criteria very different from those appropriate to the study of integration."[1]

Among those criteria, organizational tasks and institutionalization are two indicators of regional cooperation success. Regional cooperation would be measured in terms of "activities of interstate cooperative enterprises" and their impact on "institutional evolution." In other words, its success is assessed "in terms which make the organizations the centers of concern rather than to focus on their impact on the members," as Haas put it.[2]

The Mekong Project has generally been viewed as a successful application of Functionalism in international relations, as expressed officially by Mr. Narashimman:

> "Another significant aspect of the Mekong is the important part that economic progress can play in promoting political stability. The four riparian countries have all got considerable development potential, but the lack of economic progress in various parts of these countries has been the source of a certain amount of political instability. Time will show how important an element the progress of the Mekong work has been promoting political stability in the countries of the region."[3]

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1. Haas, Ernst B., arti. cit., p. 611.
2. Ibid.
3. C.V. Narashimhan, Indian Journal of Power & River Valley Development, 1966.

Impressed by the resilience of the Mekong Committee and the construction of dams in this war-torn region we had effectively thought that the Mekong Project would be a perfect illustration of the functional approach advocated by Mitrany.

However, when we went to the field we realized that it was a wrong case and there was nothing to substantiate the spill-over theory of functionalism or regional integration. For one thing, the political situation of the Lower Mekong region in the early seventies remained unstable, unsecure and unpredictable as ever, even though the Mekong Committee has been operating for nearly fifteen years. Furthermore, some riparians believed that the Mekong Project would grow in importance only after a relative conclusion of the Vietnam war.

Therefore, we thought that the functional approach was not an appropriate tool of analysis to study the Mekong Project. We needed a broader conceptual framework, which is regional cooperation.

IV.- Outline of the Study

The study is divided into three parts. Part I examines the concept of regional cooperation, defines its meaning and rationale, formulates hypotheses, sets up a model of regional cooperation and devises a conceptual framework for the analysis of Mekong regional cooperation.

Part II covers the intraregional factors of the Mekong regional cooperation process. Chapter II focuses on the importance of the Mekong river for the four riparian countries,

in spite of traditional hostilities and conflicts and little cooperation among them. Against this historical background, Chapter III grapples with problems as to who and what promoted Mekong regional cooperation, and why and how Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam came together to constitute the Mekong Committee. Chapter IV observes the Mekong Committee in operation. It explains the organizational structure of the Committee and analyses its functioning in terms of cooperation and conflict which both evolve along with the developmental process. Lastly, Chapter V comes to grips with the effects of Mekong regional cooperation on economic modernization, political security, and riparian elites' perception, and projects some problems and prospects for the future of regional cooperation among riparian countries.

Part III deals with the external factors, or "catalysts," of Mekong regional cooperation. Chapter VI starts with the role played by the United States in the Mekong Project. Since the famous Johns Hopkins Speech of April 7, 1965, American foreign policy officially and actively advocated regional cooperation among Asian countries as consistent with US national interests pursued in this region. Undoubtedly, the US has been the strongest supporter of the Mekong Project, since its inception, and in terms of financial and technical assistance it has remained the mainstay of the Project in providing, or helping to provide, funds for the Mekong Committee. However, in terms of region-building the US role was ambiguous, even contradictory, caught

between immediate US interests and long-range regional needs in the Mekong area. On quite a few occasions US actions actually led to more conflict than cooperation among the four riparian members. On the whole the US role in Mekong regional cooperation was necessary, helpful and preponderant, but more conservative and less innovative than the spirit of the Johns Hopkins Speech might suggest.

Chapter VII expounds the nature and scope of Japanese participation in the Mekong Project. In contrast to US involvement, Japanese participation was quiet, undramatic and unpublicized. This did not imply, however, a lack of interest in the Project. On the contrary, although Japan ranked third among donor countries, Japanese presence was ubiquituous in the Mekong basin, in the Mekong Secretariat as well as in the jungles of Laos, where western people could not penetrate without risking their lives. The Japanese role as region-builder in this case is difficult to assess and to predict because of the lack of a clear and articulate political concept and strategy of Japanese foreign economic aid in Southeast Asia.

Chapter VIII considers the different and varied roles of International Organizations, particularly ECAFE, UNDP, (United Nations Development Program), IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and ADB (Asian Development Bank). The emphasis and the hope of the Mekong Committee have been placed more and more upon those international bodies to help meet regional needs and solve

regional problems not only in terms of technical, economic and financial assistance, but also in the new international context of the multipolarity system prevailing in the seventies, of US disengagement from Indochina, of Communist China admission to the UN and its agencies, of Soviet growing interest in South Asia, and of rising Japanese economic power and influence in Southeast Asia.

The conclusion simply summarizes the findings and issues, draws up some tentative generalizations, and suggests some theoretical propositions and themes which need further research and study. The field of regional cooperation is still very underdeveloped. There remain too many unknown equations and unsolved conundrums to allow formulation of theory and/or predictability on the success of regional cooperation. We do hope, however, that the Mekong case study will be a stepping stone - "the first right step" - in the attempt to define a comparative approach of regional cooperation in Asia.

V. Methodology

The study concerns itself with problems which are most germane to the process of regional cooperation. It deals mainly with regional matters, regional-building institutions and intraregional activities. It involves only the highest level of the decision-making process, that is, governmental elites' perceptions and actions. It discusses the roles of great powers and their impact on the regional cooperation process. It does not take up national problems, such as political changes, social upheavals, and economic hurdles,

although they affect the process of regional cooperation. It does not take into account individual foreign policies of the four riparian states. Those limitations of the investigation were due to my lack of necessary and appropriate means for extensive and expensive research.

During my two trips back home I was able to do some field research. In January-February 1971 I visited Bangkok, Vientiane, Saigon and Tokyo but missed Phnom Penh because of the communist attack on the airport which was consequently closed down. Fortunately, I had a unique opportunity to attend the Plenary Session of the Mekong Committee held in February 1971, in Vientiane, where I did meet and talk with Cambodian delegates. The second trip in April 1972 was too short to go to Vientiane and Phnom Penh. I did return to Bangkok, where the Mekong Secretariat is located, Saigon and Tokyo to get some new information and research.

On both occasions I chose to conduct not a formal and quantitative research with written questionnaires to be filled out, but rather a selected and qualitative mode of interviews and informal talks. The choice was dictated more by necessity and realism than by my own initial preference. My financial resources and time were very limited.

Other difficulties pertain to bureaucratic slowliness and logjam, Asian traditional resentment of outside interference and natural suspicions about the purpose of such an enquiry. Moreover, being a woman, a student, and especially a political scientist does not do any good in working in

traditional societies where male superiority, age experience, social status and political mistrust are still prevalent. In fact, I felt handicapped and frustrated during the first days in Bangkok. What saved me and my research was simply "luck," not my intelligence, and certainly not the topic of my dissertation which scared people off. I was the first student who ever dared to venture into the political aspects of the Mekong Project.

What matters most in interviewing Asian officials is not how smart you are or how interesting your project is, but primarily your ability to create an atmosphere of mutual trust, confidence and understanding. One official seriously complained to me that there were many "Western" observers and western-educated Asian students "who look at things from Western eyes, do not try to understand our problems and cultures, and are always quick to report our mistakes." This "Western bias" was a real concern for most Asian officials.[1]

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1. During my first week in Bangkok I was politely received by officials who agreed to give me interviews, but I could not learn much, and what I did learn were things I already knew or could find in public documents, and I had read a lot before taking the trip. I was very discouraged by this lack of communication, when one afternoon "luck" came to me. One official I interviewed offered to give me a ride and introduced me to his wife who happened to be a very good friend of my mother. I was later adopted by the family and introduced on a personal basis to more Mekong officials. The door was then opened for me. I learnt in one day through informal and friendly talks more than I did the whole previous week. This personal experience made me wonder about the uses of field research in developing countries in general, and about the validity of so-called "scientific" method of research applied to Asian cultures, in particular.

In this study I do not use any new or particular methodology. I try to avoid sophisticated statistics and figures. Instead, the approach is simple and interdisciplinary. My tools of analysis are common logic, deduction, analogy, comparison and explanation in terms of defined political concepts and categories. I also use historical background, economic equations, psychological and cultural knowledge to raise or explain political problems and issues of the process of Mekong regional cooperation.

VI.- Review of the Literature on the Mekong Project

If the literature on regional cooperation is not elaborate, the study of the Mekong Project is not prolific either. Very few political scientists have been interested in the political aspects of the Mekong regional arrangement.

Only four books were written on this topic. The first book, The Lower Mekong: Challenge to Cooperation in Southeast Asia, was written in 1963 by C. Hart Schaaf, the first Executive Agent of the Mekong Committee, and Russell H. Fifield, a political scientist specializing in Southeast Asian affairs. The book included two parts. Part I examined the political environment in which the Mekong Scheme took place. Part II dealt with the Project itself. On the whole it was a descriptive and informative booklet (133 pages) on the Mekong Project, which was viewed as "a challenge to cooperation in Southeast Asia."

Two other books were primarily concerned with the economic factors of development in the Mekong basin: A Framework for Planned Economic Development of Lower Mekong Basin Countries,

which was written by Bhatt and Khan for the UN Asian Institute for Economic Development and Planning, in Bangkok, in 1966, and the Agricultural Development in the Mekong Basin, which was a staff study of the Resources for the Future, Inc., in Washington D.C., in 1971.

The fourth study, The Mekong River Development Project, was produced by Victor Croizat for the Rand Corporation in 1967. It focused on "some geographical, historic and political considerations" of the Mekong Project.

There existed a number of reports and articles, of which the most comprehensive and perceptive was "The Lower Mekong" written in 1966 by Professors White and Sewell for International Conciliation, No. 558. The article examined the technical aspects of the Project and raised some profound economic, social and administrative issues involved in this international river development.

Three unpublished doctoral dissertations dealt with different legal problems of the Mekong Project:

1/ L'Amenagement du Mekong Inferieur en Droit International Public, by Suphasin Jayanama, Universite de Toulouse, France, 1965.

2/ The Mekong Committee: A Genus of International Organization, by Somporn Sangchai, Indiana University, USA, 1967.

3/ The Lower Mekong River Basin: An Enquiry into the International Legal Problems of the Development Programme of the Lower Mekong Committee, by P. K. Mennon, New York University Law School, 1970.

First-hand documents concerning the Mekong Committee's meetings and activities can be found at the UN Library. They are far from being negligible in quantity but for the most

part they deal with technical investigations, economic and social problems of the river development, and they give very little information on the politics of Mekong regional cooperation.

In sum, the political and diplomatic side of the Mekong Committee remains largely an unexplored field, partly because of the political sensitivity of the problem in this troubled region, and partly because of the overemphasis on the non-political character of activities undertaken by ECAFE.

PART ONE

REGIONAL COOPERATION

Chapter I

The Concept of Regional Cooperation

I.- Definition of Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation is often advocated by Asian policy-makers but not always clearly defined. Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman of Thailand made a typical statement when he observed that:

> "After examining the whole range of problems facing the region, it may be logical to conclude that the nations and peoples of Southeast Asia are in need of regional cooperation and solidarity today more than ever."[1]

What does Regional Cooperation mean?

Regional integrationist theorist Ernest Haas called regional cooperation "a vague term covering any interstate activity with less than universal participation designed to meet some commonly experienced need."[2] For Hiroshi Kitamura of Aoyana Gakuin University in Tokyo regional cooperation "is understood to represent deliberate attempts by the countries of the region to cooperate with a view to creating organizational or institutional frameworks to promote their own individual and collective economic and social development

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1. Thailand Economic & Industrial Review, 1968, a Supplement of the Bangkok Post, Section on "Regional Development," p. 103.

2. Haas, Ernst B., "The Study of Regional Integration: Reflections on the Joy and Anguish of Pretheorizing," International Organization, Vol. XXIV, No. 4, Autumn 1970, p. 611.

by some specific means."[1] Although termed differently both definitions agree on the limitations of regional cooperation with regard to its nature and functions. The terms "deliberate attempts" and "less than universal participation" indicate that regional cooperation is voluntary and does not require mass support or participation. Functions are limited to "some commonly experienced need" or "some specific means." Statesmen, like Thanat Khoman, add another important notion of equality and reciprocity and conceive regional cooperation as a "partnership for mutual benefits."[2]

In this study we define regional cooperation as intergovernmental cooperation among equal member states of the region for specific needs and purposes and mutual benefits. This covers the nature of regional cooperation which is "intergovernmental," its participants which include "equal member states of the region," its inputs which are "specific needs and purposes," and its outputs which are "mutual benefits."

Simple as they are, they raise four sets of questions:

a/ What does "intergovernmental" mean?

b/ What do "equal member-states of the region" mean, and for that matter what is a region? and what does equal partnership entail?

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1. Hiroshi Kitamura, "Regional Cooperation As Seen From ECAFE," a paper presented at the SEADAG Regional Development Panel Seminar in New York, on December 10-11, 1971.

2. Thailand Economic & Industrial Review, 1968, p. 103.

c/ What are the "specific needs and purposes"?

d/ What do "mutual benefits" imply?

A/ What does "intergovernmental cooperation" mean?

It is important to stress from the outset the governmental nature of regional cooperation. We consider regional cooperation as a matter of policy and decision-making. This governmental character determines the boundaries and relevance of the study of regional cooperation. For example, if three or four governments decide to exchange students or arts, we will have a case of regional cooperation. But if a group of Southeast Asian students gather together in New York, Paris, Tokyo or Djakarta to set up a legal association, we do not consider this a regional cooperation enterprise. On the other hand, if a group of private Southeast Asian businessmen, with the approval of their governments, meet to discuss economic problems of the region, this is no doubt a regional cooperation effort.

In other words, it is not the type or participants of regional organizations - which can be public or private, official or unofficial, political or economic - but rather the decisions made by governments which account for the process of regional cooperation.

B/ What do "equal member-states of the region" mean?

To begin with, what is a region? Definitions vary from one regionalist to another. Although "region" is generally defined in geographical terms, the British Commonwealth of Nations is viewed as a "region" because of its historical

and cultural ties. Similarly, the Alliance of Seventy-Seven Nations at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964 can be called a "regional grouping" because of its common economic aims although it spans the Continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America,. and NATO, CENTO, SEATO, OAS are all regional organizations for security and defense purposes. To Professor Liska, a regional system is a geopolitically bounded arena of conflict, which can include states outside a geographic region and exclude those within it, depending upon the extent of their involvement in the major conflicts of the geographic area.[1] Professor Deutsch takes "core areas" of population and facilities for transportation and communication as criteria.[2] The UN Economic and Social Council conceives of regions in continental dimensions. Professor Russet defines regions in terms of similarity in socio-economic indicators and UN voting, transaction pattern and alliance membership.[3] To this Professor Oran Young replies that whatever its criteria - economic, cultural or historical - the "concept region" is bound to "the notion of physical contiguity," without which the term region "is apt to become so inclusive that

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1. Liska, G., Europe Ascendent: The International Politics Of Unification, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964

2. Deutsch, K., Political Community & the North Atlantic Area, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

3. Russett, B.M., International Regions and the International System, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967.

it is useless."[1]

In the Asian setting even if we choose the basic definition of region, that is, the geographic "contiguity," the concept of an "Asian region" is still in need of precision and clarity, as Asian scholars pointed out at the Asian Development Symposium held from May 20 through 22, 1968, in Tokyo.[2] Discussing "Regionalism in Asian Development" Hla Myint, Professor at the University of London and first President of Rangoon University, raised this question:

> "Although we talk about Asian region, we are alittle vague. Is it the ECAFE region, which included India and beyond, say two other countries like Afghanistan and Iran, or is it Southeast Asia of rather smaller countries excluding India and Pakistan?"[3]

Mr. Gadgil, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission in India, also conceded that "in an area like the Asian area, you cannot easily find a region" and added:

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1. Young, Oran R., "Professor Russet: Industrial Tailor to a Naked Emperor," World Politics, Vol. 21. No. 3, April 1969, pp. 487-488.

2. The participants include Professors Yoichi Itagaki, Shigeto Kawano, Ichiro Nakayama, Shigeto Tsuru, Noburu Yamamoto, Saburo Okita of Japan; Dhananjay Ramchangra Gadgil of India; Hla Myint of Burma; Carlos Romulo of the Philippines; Mohammead Sadli of Indonesia; John K. Galbraith, David E. Lilienthal, and Kenneth T. Young of the United States.

3. Hla Myint, Asian Development Symposium: Proceedings and Lectures, Edited by the Asahi Evening News, Tokyo, 1968, p. 54.

> "I do not think that we can think in terms in the Asian region of any groups, quite obviously nothing like the EEC, but also possibly nothing like the ECLA (Economic Commission for Latin America) even (if) the South American grouping is much closer, for I feel a variety of reasons can be much closer."[1]

Consequently, subdivisions or subregions are regarded as a more realistic approach to regionalism. In general, Asian leaders and scholars divide Asia into three subregions: 1/ Northeast Asia (China, Japan and Korea), 2/ Southeast Asia (Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) and 3/ South Asia (Ceylon, India, Nepal and Pakistan). Within Southeast Asia we find another division between continental countries (Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam) and maritime countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore) and within the Peninsula we have the distinction between French Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) and the two other English-speaking countries (Burma and Thailand).

The foregoing divisions and subdivisions point to the complexity and diversity of the Asian region. Could a sense of regional identity emerge from this "balkanization" of Asian states?

Rupert Emerson associated the sense of identity within the boundary of a nation-state to the notion of unity and commonness - common language, common symbols, common tradition,

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1. Gadgil, Asian Development Symposium: Proceedings and Lectures, Edited by the Asahi Evening News, Tokyo, 1968, p. 59.

common history and common political destiny. "It is the bringing together of peoples within a common political framework,"[1] as he put it. The difficulty in applying this definition of identity to a broader regional framework including many independent and sovereign states is that we do not have one legitimate monopoly of power but many loci of power with different sources of legitimacies and authorities.

In international regional politics we need another operational concept of identity. In the Asian setting, we define regional identity as the awareness of interdependence among states constituting the region on the one hand, and the sense of solidarity of these states against the outsiders, on the other. Interdependence is intraregional whereas solidarity is extraregional. Interdependence refers to activities and goals of people living in a common predicament. Solidarity refers to the state of people's unity and alignment in dealing with the outside world. Interdependence and solidarity do not necessarily coexist. Interdependence can exist without solidarity when members of a group depend upon each other for the realization of certain goals, but they disagree with each other in coping with outside competition, threat, or assistance. On the other hand, solidarity can prevail

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1. Emerson, Rupert, "The Problem of Identity, Selfhood, and Image in the New Nations: The Situation in Africa," Comparative Politics, Vol. 1, No. 3, April 1969, p. 305.

over interdependence when members of a group are only united in presenting demands and claims to other groups, or in fighting a common external danger, while each one pursues his own course, or even competes with other members within the group.

What this definition implies is that regional identity is primarily decisional. Whereas national identity is a feeling and attitutde, regional identity is first and foremost a matter of decision-making, or "high politics" in Haas' terminology. Each nation decides about the necessity of its interdependence and solidarity with its neighbors. Nations that choose to isolate themselves and disregard interdependence and solidarity with their neighbors as necessary for their survival and development cannot be said to possess a sense of regional identity. The case in point is Burma which, although situated in the heart of Continental Asia, has closed its doors to neighboring states for many years.

On the other hand, Australia and New Zealand have shifted their regional identity from Europe to Asia in the late sixties. The eventuality of the British entry into the European Common Market and economic integration in the European-Atlantic area which would hit Australia and New Zealand hard[1] made them realize that their own national

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1. Wilson, Dick, Asia Awakes, A Mentor Book, 1971, p. 286.

development will depend on their interdependence and solidarity with Asian countries. Australia and New Zealand joined the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC) in 1966, participated actively in the Mekong Project, and even attended the Djakarta Conference on May 16, 1970, on the Cambodian crisis.

These two cases of Burma and Australia-New Zealand illustrate the decisional character of regional identity. Moreover, because it is a deliberate decision, regional identity shifts in place and in time according to political leaders' perception of interdependence and solidarity. This regional identity transfer has been undertaken by Australia and New Zealand, which two decades ago identified themselves with the Anglo-Saxon community by joining ANZUS in 1951, and of course, the British Commonwealth.

Regional identity is not static. It can be enhanced by what we call "identity-sustaining experiences," such as common working language, common patterns of behavior, common problems and needs, common activities and common understanding among the same persons with similar background, energy and motivation.

The sense of belonging to a region can also be fortified by an extensive network of exchanges, transactions, interactions and contacts, or "articulated linkages" as Kenneth Young called it. These contacts include visits, meetings consultations, deliberations, discussions and many other reciprocal forms of communications in political economic,

cultural and military affairs.

This network of articulated linkages can be analyzed and measured by the number of exchanges that take place. Thus, the significance of this network can be stated in terms of how these countries should be ranked in the order of importance for such transactions.

As to the notion of "equal members" or "partnership" it constitutes one of the two pillars on which regional cooperation is based - the other pillar being the notion of "mutual benefits." Equality among cooperating members means equal treatment, equal rights and equal obligations regardless of their size, population, resources or GNP. Laos with a population of 3.3 million and Thailand with a population 33 million are equal members and each has one vote and one veto in the Mekong Committee. Equality among cooperating members also means respect for sovereignty of nation-states and tolerance of differences between them, without which cooperation could not take place.

Indeed, cooperation is "pluralistic" because "it programs the continuation of the game by maintaining and insisting upon the legitimacy of differences,"[1] and not the termination of the game by insisting on the principle of unity and unilateral victory. To put it in other words, regional cooperation concerns a common undertaking in terms which make

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1. Horowitz, I.L., "Consensus, Conflict and Cooperation: A Sociological Inventory," Social Forces, December 1962, p. 187.

possible the continuation of differences and even fundamental disagreements.

To small countries like those of Southeast Asia which are so divided and so different politically, diplomatically, economically, socially and culturally, this notion of "equality" and "partnership" is a fundamental condition for joining in any regional effort and project.

C/ What do "specific needs and purposes" mean?

From the above notion of "equality" or "partnership" of cooperating members and tolerance of their differences and divergencies, it entails that regional cooperation must be dealt with in concrete terms and interests. As Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo of the Philippines put it, "when we discuss regional cooperation, we must speak of specifics."[1]

The urge to be "specific" and "concrete" responds to the great diversity among developing countries of Asia and Africa in levels of development, standards of living and growth rates, not to mention social and cultural diffences. Accordingly those countries have different needs and capacities. It is therefore suggested that regional cooperation be "plural, limited and optional."[2]

This pragmatic approach would take into account the diverse, concrete interests of individual countries

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1. Romulo, Carlos, Asian Development Symposium, p. 62.
2. Young, Kenneth, ibid., p. 61.

participating in regional cooperation. This being said, needs and purposes are varied. They can be economic, cultural, political or military.

This pragmatic approach has other advantages, too. First, groupings can be various and set up for different and specific purposes, as elaborated by Mr. Gadgil:

> "One set of neighboring countries finds it best to group together for certain purposes; another set, a series of different sets of combinations can very usefully take place...Where you perceive a common interest in development, in trade, in anything, you try to approach each other and establish a group for that common purpose. As you go along, you may get a larger frame. It may be that if we can get a larger frame within which these groupings take place, the groupings may be facilitated."[1]

Second, some needs and interests or "sectors of life" are more suitable for regional cooperation than others, as Mr. Sadli explained in introducing the concept of "quick-yielding projects versus long-yielding projects":

> "The difference between quick-yielding and long-yielding...is - there are certain endeavors, certain projects that lend themselves more practically for regional cooperation, where in a short time the cake gets bigger and the dividends can be reaped much faster. This is an area where probably consensus of decision or cooperative efforts are faster to be attained."[2]

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1. Dhananjay Ramchandra Gadgil, Asian Development Symposium, p. 59.

2. Mohammad Sadli, Ibid., p. 56.

In sum, a regional cooperation approach is pragmatic and realistic, and seeks concrete benefits.

D/ What do "mutual benefits" mean?

Mutual benefits constitute the output considerations of regional cooperation and account for the attractiveness of the latter concept for small countries which have been economically underdeveloped and politically at odds. As the study on the Postwar Development of the Republic of Vietnam correctly pointed out, "in the run the richest development of the country lies in cooperative development with its neighbors, and that is equally true for every other nation in the region."[1] The study scored "potential benefits" and "substantial benefits" which could only be achieved by a joint and coordinated action.

The need to consider regional cooperation on the basis of tangible benefits is important, because it is generally argued that regional cooperation among unequal member-states is risky and fragile unless benefits are clearly defined and perceived by each participant. The risk is that most schemes for economic cooperation result in the richer, stronger members growing richer and stronger at a more

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1. Report on the Postwar Development of the Republic of Vietnam, Policies and Programs, Joint Development Group, RVN, March 1969, p. 33. The Joint Development Group consists of the Postwar Planning Group headed by Professor Vu Quoc Thuc, and the Development & Resources Corporation headed by David E. Lillienthal.

rapid rate than the poorer and weaker members. This might create a competitive and conflicting situation which political leaders want to avoid in stressing the notions of "partnership" and "mutual benefits."

Mutual benefits imply an equitable share in the outputs. Indeed, sharing equitably the output advantages is vital for the process of regional cooperation. Unless a distributive system of benefits is commonly accepted by cooperating members and implemented as part of any scheme, cooperation will decline or disintegrate.

Many regionalist thinkers and economists seem to agree that a "distribution crisis" of benefits has psychological, economic and political effects, arousing fears and strains among participant members. According to Gunnar Myrdal, an unequal distribution of benefits would result in "backwash effects,"[1] meaning a concentration of capital, skilled labor, and technology in the more advanced centers, "thus tending to increase regional disparities in levels of developments."[2]

Backwash problems can in turn become a major political issue, a subject of competition and frictions among cooperating countries. Most political scientists consider "the political sensitivity in less developed countries to the

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1. Myrdal, Gunnar, Economic Theory & Underdeveloped Regions, London, 1957.

2. Hansen, Roger D., "Regional Integration: Reflections on a Decade of Theoretical Efforts," World Politics, Vol. XXI, No. 2, January 1969, p. 256.

problem of equal distribution" to be "the crucial issue" in regional cooperation process.[1] Joseph Nye aptly observes that backwash effects of regional integration among developing countries trigger not "gradual politicization," or "spill-over" in Haas-Schmitter model, but "over-politicization."[2]

II.- The Rationale of Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation seeking tangible and mutual benefits is primarily a means, not an end, to achieve national development in political, economic, social and cultural fields. Regional cooperation is function of nationalism, contributing to national development, to what Singaporian Foreign Minister Rajaratnam called "Development Nationalism."[3] Indeed, "Development Nationalism" is both the rationale for regional cooperation and the new ideology combining nationalism and regionalism.

National development through regional cooperation responds to a new nation's needs to build its economic development and national consolidation since it is conceded that, alone, each nation is "a tiny speck on the global landscape," whereas, united, nations "will become a viable entity

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1. Hansen, Roger D., "Regional Integration: Reflections on a Decade of Theoretical Efforts," World Politics, Vol. XXI, No. 2, January 1969, pp. 258-259.

2. Hansen, Ibid., p. 257.

3. S. Rajaratment, "Beyond Nationalism, More Nationalism," Solidarity (a monthly magazine published in Manila), Vol. IV, No. 1, January 1969, p. 8.

with an abundance of resources."[1] Moreover, because of the rapid technological progress and an unprecedented development of means of communications, nations live in a new era of interdependence requiring mutual help and joint action to promote development.

National development through regional cooperation also helps maintain freedom and independence of new nations. The fear of great power domination is still of great concern and has caused smaller nations to close their ranks and work together. Regional cooperation, as Thanat Khoman contended, "offers us the best possible way not only for surviving as free nations and peoples but also for progress and prosperity for our respective peoples."[2]

In this view, nationalism and regionalism would not be antithetic but complementary and dialectic. Furthermore, they reinforce each other. It should be noted, however, that we deal with a new nationalism with a new content and appeal , as Rajaratnam explained:

> "The nationalism which was appropriate in the fight for freedom is inappropriate to deal with problems of independence...What we need is a new nationalism to be created by the relatively simple renovation and replacement of its pasts."[3]

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1. Thanat Khoman, "Regional Cooperation," Thailand Economic and Industrial Review, 1968, p. 103.

2. Thanat, art. cit., p. 103.

3. Rajaratman, art. cit., p. 43.

This "contemporary nationalism" in Asia is seen as "confronted not with expansionism (of colonial empires) but with the urgency of development."[1] And that nationalism is "the most powerful force for change in the new nations."[2]

Therefore, contemporary nationalism would not conflict with regionalism, since national development demands the country "to engage in exchange, either in the form experts or technology and material resources with other countries."[3] Briefly stated, "contemporary nationalism" is a trend toward regionalism.

The growth of national development and regional cooperation thus flowed back and forth from one to the other within a process of reciprocal, alternating duality. The dialectic of regional cooperation entwined nationalism and regionalism and interwove internality and externality, that is, the independent but interrelated thrusts of domestic drives and foreign pressures.

On the other hand, the outcome of this symbiotic duality is difficult to foresee. Some regionalist experts, like Peter Lyon, think that regional conflicts and divisiveness, a traditional feature of Southeast Asia, is not likely to

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1. Romulo, Carlos, Asian Development Symposium, p. 48.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

disappear in the near future. In his view, relationships within and among the states of Southeast Asia "today, and the foreseable future," would be characterized by "many situations of intermediacy..., of neither war nor peace."[1]

As to whether regional cooperation is fulfilling the goal of national development, there is no easy answer. The impact of regional cooperation on national development is difficult to grasp and measure because of the dialectic and symbiotic relationship between nationalism and regionalism, as Kenneth Young rightly observed:

> "Nationalism can survive without regionalism, but regionalism cannot even begin without nationalism, without the nation- state, without some national solidarity within a geographic and political unit. The two are inseparable, but regionalism is no panacea. On the other hand, national development can be helped by regional development."[2]

This symbiotic duality can be compared less to a traditional hierarchical succession than to a conventional Asian marriage based on reason and the uncontested superiority of the husband. The new bride can help her husband and his family, but she is certainly not the key note in this new unit. The last word belongs to her master and the family chief, but the harmony and growth of the family depend upon

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1. Lyon, Peter, War and Peace in Southeast Asia, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 230.

2. Young, Kenneth, Asian Development Symposium, pp. 60-61.

both of them. Effectively, Asian regional cooperation appears more circular and horizontal in scope and thrust than linear and vertical in a chronological or functional sequence of stages leading from the most limited to the most complex, or a systematic progression step by step from discussion to interaction, to coordination and to cooperation.

III.- A Model of Regional Cooperation

The study of regional cooperation includes three different but interrelated factors: 1/ the size and composition of the regional or subregional grouping, 2/ the type of cooperation and 3/ the degree of cooperation. To begin with, the success of any regional grouping will partly depend upon its size and composition. If the group is too small, there is not much to cooperate. If it is too big, dis-economy of skill may arise - perhaps in a more political and psychological sense than in an economic sense. Likewise, the composition of participating nations is significant because there are some countries which occupy a unique position and which constitute what Professor Deutsch called "core areas"[1] in a regional configuration.

However, the proper size and composition of regional arrangements are not enough to foster regional cooperation

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1. Core areas are not only characterized by their size, but also by other indicators: technology (Singapore), diplomacy (Thailand) and Vietnam by the war, the outcome of which will affect its neighbors.

among neighboring countries. The type of cooperation is also a determinant factor because each country has both special ties and great differences with its neighbors. Thailand, for example, could be said to have religious affinities with Cambodia and ethnic ties with Laos. But Thai economy has been much stronger than Cambodian and Laotian economy. This kind of similarity and differentiation may make a country feel either enthusiastic or apprehensive to cooperate with others.[1]

There are various types of cooperation: economic (trade, transportation, tourism, banking...), cultural (exchange of students, researches, sports...), military (exchange of intelligence information or troops...) or political to set up "a power base," as described by the Foreign Minister of Thailand:

> "Furthermore, through regional cooperation based on equal partnership and mutual benefit, a power base can be set up for the nations in the area to deal more adequately and more advantageously with both foe and friend, with outside powers and with powers inside the region. This power base will help our group to become respectable in the eyes of our foes and at the same time serve as an entity for our friends to cooperate with on a more equal footing to preserve peace and stability in this region in a more meaningful manner."[2]

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1. Asian Development Symposium, p. 59.

2. Thailand Economic & Industrial Review 1968, p. 103.

Those different fields of cooperation, although distinct, are linked together. On the one hand, most Asian observers believe that cooperation should be "phased," as Chanchal Sarkar cautioned in The Asia Magazine: "Cultural and economic cooperation will have to come first...Much later political cooperation might be possible."[1] Indeed, the idea that economic and cultural cooperation would hopefully lead to political cooperation has been put forward by many Asian politicians and practitioners of regional cooperation. Mr. Takeshi Watanabe, Japanese President of the Asian Development Bank, called regional cooperation "a catalytic force" and asserted that "if a regional or multi-national venture can demonstrate convincingly that its economic benefits to the participants are substantial, it is less likely to encounter political opposition."[2]

On the other hand, quite a few Asian leaders express the conviction that the various fields of cooperation are not linked together in a chronological order, but they are rather intertwined in a complex interplay between economics and politics. They hold that economic regional development,

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1. Chanchal Sarkar, "The Culture of Cooperation," The Asia Magazine, September 29, 1968, p. 22.

2. Takeshi, Watanabe, "Cooperation - The Catalytic Force," The Asia Magazine, September 29, 1968, p. 26. Mr. Takeshi Watanabe, a graduate in political science from Tokyo's Imperial University, served in the Japanese Ministry of Finance and was executive director for Japan of the World Bank before joining the Asian Development Bank.

to be effective, needs political cooperation among participating countries. However, this political cooperation will not depend upon economic benefits of regional cooperation but primarily upon the internal political situation of each country. This argument has been advanced by Prime Minister Le Kuan Yew of Singapore who declared that:

> "The prospect for economic and political cooperation in South and Southeast Asia would be brighter if there were more stability and security. For then each of the nation states would feel more secure and so be more confident to cooperate economically and politically, without nagging doubts that it may lead to their dismemberment or disintegration."[1]

This dilemma has been found in Vu Van Thai's search for "a regional solution for Vietnam" which discovered that "the prospect for regional cooperation and the hope for a settlement in Vietnam seemed linked together in a kind of vicious cicle. The chances for regional cooperation appear remote so long as the war in Vietnam continues; and the chances for a settlement of the war would be increased if regional cooperation became more feasible."[2] The debate between those two divergent views of economic and political cooperation is still open.

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1. Le Kuan Yew, The Asia Magazine, September 29, 1968, p. 5.
2. Vu-Van-Thai, "A Regional Solution for Vietnam," Foreign Affairs, January 1968, pp. 358-359

What is clear is that regardless of the type of co-operation - economic, cultural or political - regional co-operation in Asia has evolved only in governmental circles. This leads us to the third factor of regional cooperation which deals with the degree of cooperation. Actually, the degree of cooperation among the Asian countries is rather thin and involves only this small portion of the ruling elite. All Southeast Asian regional organizations are inter-governmental bodies at ministerial levels. Regional cooperation has not yet reached the majority of people. "Individuals or non-official organizations hardly matter," as Chanchal Sarkar commented:

> "If some dreamers in Britain, for instance, thought that closer relations with the USA were desirable they would set up the Pilgrims' Trust, or the Americans would set up the Harkness Fund... If somebody in Britain thought it necessary to foster a Commonwealth feeling or even a Commonwealth-America feeling, he would set up and encourage something like the Rhodes Scholarships. But Asian businessmen are too busy making money to think of these things."[1]

The analogy is certainly exaggerated because the conditions are not the same in Britain and in Asia, but the point is that there are very few private contacts between Asian people. Asian students prefer to go to Europe or America. They know more about European or American history and

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1. Chanchal Sarkar, "The Culture of Cooperation," The Asia Magazine, September 29, 1968, p. 20.

politics than their own neighbors'. Visiting professors come from Europe or America rather than other Asian countries. The Asian Games, the Magsaysay Awards, and Asian Film Festivals have been the few non-governmental organizations to make a constructive contribution to regional cooperation. Generally speaking, there are not many films about Asia, prepared and exhibited in Asian countries, not many books written by Asians for each other, and not many exchanges of newspapers or scholarly journals between Asian countries. It is easier to find the Newsweek magazine in Saigon than the Bangkok Post. As Chanchal Sarkar correctly remarked, "the number of newspaper correspondents, the column-inch coverage of stories, their content (the Vietnam war, for instance, is bound to get more coverage than social change) all point to the fact that Asia is surrounding itself in a cocoon of ignorance and indifference about itself."[1]

What bothers many Asian regionalists is that there is no such concept of "Asian citizenship," "Asian man," or "Asianness," which implies a "feeling of commonness" and "a sense of involvement."[2] In short, regionalism has been a governmental policy and not an attitude.

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1. Chanchal Sarkar, The Asia Magazine, September 29, 1968, p. 20.

2. Ibid.

IV.- Hypotheses

From the definition and rationale of regional cooperation two hypotheses can be made. First, the greater the benefits, the greater incentive there would be for cooperation. Second, the more equitable distribution of benefits among participating members, the more effective cooperation would be among them. The two formulations are closely linked. The first hypothesis is necessary but not sufficient to promote and sustain regional cooperation. Benefits, being a stimulus for the process of cooperation but not cooperation itself, do not necessarily reinforce cooperative behavior. They could also bring about conflicting situations if the participants disagree on, and feel unsatisfied with, their share of benefits.

Thus the second hypothesis concerning the equitable distribution of benefits is needed to explain cooperation, competition, conflict and efficiency within the group. Equitable distribution of benefits need not mean an equal share since the needs, capacities, resources and contributions of each cooperating country may vary and provide a basis for distributing benefits unevenly. This will not necessarily result in competition and conflict so long as the distribution follows the principle of "distributive justice" in Aristotle's terms.

Yet many regionalist scholars warn about cooperation between unequal members, which can easily, it is claimed, create an explosive political situation. The issue of

"distribution crisis" is already treated above to repeat here. Suffice it to note that "distribution crisis" is very dependent upon members' perception, hope, expectation or anticipation of their goals. A member who does not get any pay-off or reward after five years of cooperation but still hopes to benefit from cooperation in the far future will not likely provoke a conflictive situation. Each of the participating members must have a vested interest in continuing the arrangements if cooperation is to succeed. The question is: how long can he keep waiting and hoping for some benefits? There will be no easy answer since benefits and rewards are not the only factors conducive to cooperation. The necessity of interdependence in development, mutual respect of group members, and/or situation of political stress could also contribute to cooperation.

The basic theme is that benefits must be distributed equitably. However, since benefits cannot be obtained and distributed to all participants at once and for all, cooperation or conflict will depend not only upon actual benefits but also upon potential and future benefits. Here members' perception and expectation of goals are as crucial as realities of cooperation.

V.- An Analytical Framework

We have successively dealt with the definition, rationale, model and hypotheses of regional cooperation in Asia. They constitute basic elements which mostly explain the why and what of regional cooperation. To understand

how regional cooperation functions and evolves, we must consider its dynamics. Any study of a regional cooperation process must examine both intraregional and exogeneous forces at work. Failure or success or regional cooperation will, in the final analysis, depend upon their interaction.

Thus we should address ourselves to some key issues:

1/ How does regional cooperation come about? Is it an indigenous initiative and membership? Is it imposed by external powers?

2/ How do participating members cooperate in the regional organization? How do they solve their conflicts?

3/ How does regional cooperation process effect elite's perceptions and actions? What are the factors that go into making up a sense of regional identity?

4/ What is the impact of intraregional activities on regional institution-building?

5/ As far as institutionalization is concerned, is the functional approach the best answer? What about the interplay between economics and politics, and this symbiotic duality mentioned above?

6/ How do exogeneous factors influence regional cooperation process? How important are they in the initiation and development stages? What are the specific roles of international organizations, on one hand, and great powers, on the other? What is the relationship between international politics and regional politics? Is there convergence and compatibility or conflict and collision?

These are the fundamental questions which guide my research and study of the process of Mekong regional cooperation.

PART TWO

INTRAREGIONAL VARIABLES

Chapter II

The Lower Mekong Setting

Starting in the snowy mountains of Tibet, the Mekong river, the third largest in Asia, runs 4,000 kilometers to the South China Sea through six countries - China, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Flowing down out of China, the Mekong serves as the border between Burma and Laos. Beyond the tri-point at which the borders of Burma, Laos and Thailand meet, the river is referred to as the Lower Mekong. It mostly forms the frontier between Laos and Thailand, crosses Cambodian territory, runs into South Vietnam and empties its water into the South China Sea. The Lower Mekong Basin - which concerns our study - covers an area of 620,000 square kilometers and four countries: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The importance of the Lower Mekong river for its riparian people cannot be emphasized enough. In the past, the Mekong river played a preponderant role in shaping the political, economic and social life of the Khmers, Thais, Laos, and Vietnamese. As we will see later, those migrant people all strove for the domination of the Lower Mekong Basin. Their relationships were marked by conquests, rivalries and hostilities. Cooperation among them was rare, and whenever it occurred it was an attempt of two nations to get rid of the third common enemy, such as the cooperation

between the Cambodians and Vietnamese against the Thais in the seventeenth century. Cooperation usually took the form of princely marriages and unions.

Today, despite their historical background of conflicts and rivalries, the four countries of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam cooperate together to harness and develop the gigantic and powerful Mekong. In fact, the river is the only unifying factor of those four nations for its promising economic benefits. As a natural resource, the Lower Mekong is "a source of tremendous potentialities for power production, irrigation, navigation, and flood control, a source virtually unutilized."[1]

It is my purpose in this chapter to examine the historical significance of the Mekong river and the present need for riparian cooperation for its development.

I.- Historical Significance of the Mekong River

Since the beginning of history the Mekong river performed three principal and successive functions as an avenue of migration and conquest, a source of exploration and competition, and a center of economic and political power.

As one of the main avenues of migration of population from North to South in mainland Southeast Asia, the Mekong river was used, in particular, by the Khmers, the Vietnamese

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1. Atlas of Physical, Economic and Social Resources of the Lower Mekong Basin, United Nations, September 1968, p. v.

and the Thais in their "push to the South."

During the early centuries A.D. the ethnically Mongoloid Khmers were the first people to migrate southward down the Mekong valley to the delta and westward into the basin of the Tonle Sap, or Great Lake, of Cambodia. This region, formerly called the empire of Funan, dominated all the shores of the Gulf of Siam and also a part of Annam above the Mekong delta. Interior transportation within Funan proper was waterborne, using the Mekong delta, the Tonle Sap River, and interior canals. Products of Funan consisted mainly of rice, sugar cane, cotton from the fertile plains of the interior Great Lake Basin and fish from an annual harvest taken when the lake's waters receded.

In the second half of the sixth century the Empire of Funan in the Lower Mekong valley was conquered by the Khmers and collapsed. The kingdom of Cambodia was built on its ruins. In 1002, Khmer sovereignty extended to the Menam valley. In 1177, the Kingdom of Cambodia annexed for about twenty years the Kingdom of Champa.

Cambodian expansion into the West and the East of the Lower Mekong coincided with the weakening of the authority of China toward the end of the T'ang dynasty in the tenth century and the Sung dynasty at the end of the eleventh century. However, these developments were put to an end by the arrival of the Mongols.

Indeed, the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century and the attempts of Kublai Khan, successor of the Sung

emperors, to establish hegemony over the countries of the southern seas beginning in 1260 had severe political repercussions in this area. The Mongol invasion directly and indirectly caused the decline of the kingdoms of Cambodia and Champa, and at the same time it favored the Vietnamese drive into the South and the advent of Thai power in the Menam basin.

The Thais, established mainly in Yunnan, began their gradual infiltration along the rivers and streams in the early decades of the 1200s. By the middle of the thirteenth century they occupied the Shan states of Eastern Burma, the upper reaches of the Menam basin, and the country to the East of the Mekong. This rapid success of the Thais in the Menam basin was partly helped by the Mongol campaigns in Burma, Cambodia and Champa, and by the Mongol policy of encouraging the creation of numerous small principalities whose obedience was easier to maintain.

The first half of the fourteenth century saw a further expansion of the Thais. Already masters of Burma and the upper Menam valley they founded the Thai kingdom of Ayuthia in the basin of the Lower Menam in 1350. Three years later, an able Thai, Fa Ngum, found the kingdom of Lan Chan (Laos) on the Mekong.

Laos had been covered with "muong" or totally independent village groups. And the Laotians - ethnically akin to the Thais, sharing their language and customs - have only been united under either a powerful neighboring state,

Cambodia or Siam, or when the two strongest groups among them, the principalities of Luang Prabang or Vientiane, had kings energetic enough to achieve a confederation or a kind of union. In 1353, Fa Ngum, who married a Cambodian princess, succeeded in creating a kingdom for himself out of the Laotian principalities and established his capital at Luang Prabang.

The peaceful period which followed was interrupted in 1478 by a Vietnamese invasion. In the middle of the sixteenth century the Laotian capital was moved to Vientiane. Following the death of the last great Laotian King, Souligna-Vongsa, in 1964, internal struggles for power and attacks by neighboring states gradually weakened the country. Its people emigrated to Siam, Cambodia or Burma. In the nineteenth century, the kingdom of Laos disintegrated into small principalities: Champassak in the South became an integral part of Siam, Luang Prabang had vassal relationship to Siam, Vientiane was incorporated into Siam after 1827, and Xieng-Khouang (Plain of Jars) fell under the suzerainty of Annam in 1832.

As already stated, the decline of the Mongol dynasty in the second half of the fourteenth century corresponded with the emergence of two powers in the Indochinese Peninsula: The Thai and the Vietnamese. In 1431, Angkor fell into the hands of Siam. Four decades later, in 1471, the Chams abandoned their capital, Vijaya, to the Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese, like the Thai, Lao and Khmer people, originated in China South of the Yangtze river, and, facing the assimilative pressure of the Chinese, moved southward and settled in the Red River delta in about 254 B.C.. In spite of their efforts to escape the Chinese, the Vietnamese were, however, conquered by Han China around 111 B.C. And for the next thousand years the Vietnamese lived under Chinese rule and Confucian influence.

Following the collapse of the T'ang dynasty the Vietnamese finally broke away from Chinese domination in 939 A.D. and began their march to the South. In spreading southward they undertook the conquest of Champa kingdom, which completely disappeared by 1500. At the end of the eighteenth century Vietnam expanded to the full extent of its present shore line.

Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia started in 1623 when a Cambodian king married a Vietnamese princess in an attempt to shake Siam's overlordship with the help of the Nguyen dynasty. In exchange for that help, the Vietnamese settlers were allowed to cross over the Cambodian border, and in 1660 Cambodia began to pay a regular tribute to the Court of Hue.

In the early nineteenth century Cambodia was the scene of rivalry between Siam and Vietnam. In 1841, Cambodia was incorporated into Vietnam, but after a Cambodian revolt encouraged by Siam and a brief war in which Siam and Vietnam fought each other to a stand-off, both countries

agreed in 1845 to a condominium. Thus, on the eve of French intervention Cambodia, like Laos, paid tribute to both Siam and Vietnam.

The long period of migration and conquest of new land by the Indochinese people ended with British expansion into upper Burma and French advance into Indochina. The nineteenth century opened a new era for the countries and people of Indochina. The Mekong river, which was merely a route of migration for them, became a field of exploration and competition for the European powers, and very soon the Mekong was transformed into a battleground between French Indochina and Siam backed by England. What was known as "the Siamese Question" or "the Mekong Problem" was far from being a diplomatic issue. On the contrary, it deeply affected the political destinies of these countries and people.

Seven years after seizing the port of Saigon (1859) and three years after establishing a protectorate over Cambodia (1863), the French set up a "Mission du Mekong" headed by Doudard de Lagree, the French Resident in Cambodia, and Francis Garnier, a naval officer. The systematic study of the Mekong by the French team was one of the major explorations of the century, as regards its scientific, economic and political importance. Since France's primary interest in Cochinchina, or the Mekong delta region, lay in its proximity to China's southern provinces it was imperative to investigate the navigability of the great river that united them.

The expedition left Saigon in June 1866 and lasted two years. From the outset the first rapids convinced Lagree and Garnier that the Mekong was a capricious river completely unnavigable for half of the year. The discovery of the inadequacy of the Mekong as a trading route to China was one of the early disappointments of the French. On the other hand, the expedition drew Garnier's attention to Siamese expansion in Laos and to the importance of Tonkin to France. And when Lagree's death left Garnier in charge of the expedition, he gave a political character to what had hitherto been only a scientific and commercial exploration. The "Mission du Mekong" brought to the fore the inevitability of a clash with Siam, if France intended to expand into north-western Indochina.

The first encounter between Siam and France occurred in 1863 when Cambodia, which was torn between Siam and Vietnam, was placed under France's protection.[1] Siam contested the establishment of the French protectorate. However, in 1867 when the whole Mekong delta region became a French colony the Thais accepted a compromise in which Thai recognition of the protectorate was exchanged for French confirmation of Thai possession over the former Cambodian western provinces of Siem Reap (where Angkor is located) and Battambang.

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1. In 1845, a condominium policy was adopted by both Siam and Vietnam. Siam occupied the Western provinces of Cambodia and Vietnam acquired the Mekong delta.

The treaty of 1867 between France and Siam did establish the status of Cambodia but did not solve the competition between both countries for the occupation of the Mekong valley. Laos, where the Mekong runs over 805 kilometers and covers an area of 220,500 square kilometers, became the rallying point of both parties.

In 1875, French Auguste Pavie headed a second expedition to explore the upper reaches of the Mekong. Just when he arrived in Luang Prabang, Laos was invaded by the Chinese bandits Hos. To avoid their atrocities the Laotians simply fled at their approach, even from the capital Luang Prabang. Siam did nothing to stop this mass exodus across the Mekong and was unable to protect her vassal against the bandits. The situation had not yet been settled when France established her protectorate over Annam (Central Vietnam) and Tonkin (North Vietnam) in 1884. Pavie decided, then to intervene in Laos against the Hos to counterbalance Siamese influence and to control the Mekong.

At that point, a third factor entered into the situation: The British expansion in Burma. French conquest in Tonkin and British annexation of Upper Burma inevitably brought the two European powers face to face on the Mekong in their search for access to Southern China. In September 1884, Waddington, the French Ambassador to London, suggested to Lord Salisbury that it might be desirable to arrange a division of influence in the Indochinese Peninsula. Salisbury replied that a mutual agreement binding both countries not

to acquire Siamese territory might be appropriate, but nothing further was done at the time, since both powers were busy consolidating their recent conquests.

In 1893, after the Thai-Burmese border had been worked out between Siam and Great Britain, the Mekong problem appeared on the scene in a tangible form. In March 1893, the French Ambassador to London, and Pavie, who had been Resident Minister in Bangkok since February 1892, declared that France regarded none of the left bank of the Mekong river as Siamese territory; all that had been hitherto Vietnamese was now French. The Siamese Cabinet refused to consider it.

After many frontier incidents the crisis reached its peak in July 1893, when the French sent two gunboats to Bangkok to blockade the port and to support French claims to the left bank of the Mekong. The Siamese then fired the first shots and hostilities broke out. On July 20, Pavie delivered an ultimatum demanding, among other things, the territory on the left bank of the Mekong, including Luang Prabang. Siam refused to yield. By July 29, the French were requiring additional guarantees: the occupation of Chantabun, Siam's second biggest port, pending her evacuation of the left bank of the Mekong; the creation of an unfortified zone on the Siamese side of the Mekong. Lacking British support Siam accepted these terms on August 3, and signed the Treaty of October 3, 1893.

Like the 1867 Franco-Siam Treaty which saved Cambodia, the Treaty of 1893 did save Laos but did not solve the Mekong problem. In 1904, a new treaty slightly modified the Laotian frontier to France's advantage; Siam definitely renounced her sovereignty over Luang Prabang; and a joint commission was appointed to trace the frontier between Tonle Sap and the Sea.

However, further trouble arose over the ambiguous wording of the 1904 Treaty. A Boundary Commission under Colonel Bernard discovered real difficulties that remained to be solved and negotiations were resumed. The result was the very important Treaty of 1907 which stipulated that Siam would return two Cambodian provinces - Siem Reap and Battambang - to France and France would abandon her extra-territorial rights in Siam. The territorial loss was compensated by moral prestige: Siam's sovereign rights were recognized and the country was treated as an equal among the foreign powers. Still, the problem of using the Mekong river by the Thai nationals remained unsolved. French policy had never ceased to consider the Mekong as a French river and the Thai position had consistently refused to view it other than as a frontier along which both countries have equal rights.

After World War I - which saw a Franco-Thai alliance against the Germans - a convention was reached on August 25, 1926. The new frontier settlement made the thalweg of the Mekong the riverine bordeline except where there were islands

which still belonged to France, and in which case the riverine border would be the channel between the islands and the Thai bank, rather than the thalweg. The demilitarization of the Mekong was now extended to the French zone too. Lastly, a Permanent Franco-Siamese Commission of the Mekong was set up to deal with difficulties produced by the implementation of the agreement.

In 1937, a Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation abrogated the tariff-free zone which had been created in 1893 on the Siamese boundary of the Mekong. Both Siam and France were now free to impose custom duties. The Permanent Franco-Siamese Commission of the Mekong, which had not convened since 1931, was revived to police fishing and navigation rights and duties along the frontier river.

In October 1940, Thailand[1] allied herself with Japan against the European powers in Indochina. The Thai goal was the recoverey of Laotian tracts on the west bank of the Mekong ceded to France in 1904, and the two western provinces in Cambodia - Siem Reap and Battambang - ceded in 1907. These territories were transferred to Thailand by the Franco-Thai Treaty signed in Tokyo on May 9, 1941, but were reversed after the Japanese surrender in 1945 and by another Franco-Thai Treaty signed in Washington on November 17, 1946. This put an end to the Mekong dispute and determined the actual frontiers in the Indochinese Peninsula.

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1. The country's name "Siam" was replaced by "Thailand" in 1939.

The impact of the "Mekong Problem" on the Indochinese countries and people was twofold. On the one hand, French interest in the Lower Mekong - as a possible trade route to Southern China - undoubtedly saved Cambodia and Laos. Without French intervention, Cambodia "would most probably have disappeared and a direct boundary between Thailand and Vietnam would have evolved along a line not far to the West of the Mekong."[1] The fate of Laos would also have been different without the competition between France and Thailand for the occupation of the Mekong valley.

On the other hand, British interest in the Upper Mekong - also as a possible trade route to Southern China - indirectly preserved Thailand's independence and sovereignty. Indeed, Great Britain played only a peripheral role in the Mekong dispute in encouraging Thailand to resist French encroachment on the Lower Mekong valley, but her rivalry with France in mainland Southeast Asia led to the Franco-British Treaty of 1896 which guaranteed the neutrality of the Menam valley. Thailand was the buffer state separating the two European empires.

The Mekong, as a source of exploration and competition, has considerably altered the geopolitical structure in Indochina.

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1. Lamb, Alastair, Asian Frontiers, New York: Praeger, 1968, p. 181.

Finally, bridge or barrier, the Mekong and its tributaries have always been the centers of economic and political power which determine the lives of people in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.[1]

In Cambodia, the Mekong and its tributaries constitute the heart of the body politic. The great majority of the population live along the river and its tributaries, the Tonle Sap and the Great Lake. The geographical location of Phnom Penh - the royal residence, the administrative capital, the cultural center and business city of the country - is very illustrative of the vital role played by the Mekong in Cambodia. It is situated just at the junction where the Tonle Sap and the Mekong rivers meet together.

Like her predessor, the Empire of Funan, Cambodia's political and economic power is based on water. The country's river system is an abundant source of fish, agriculture depends on man-made reservoirs and irrigation channels around which the population tended to concentrate, and commerce uses the Mekong as the principal trade route and the best means of communication.

This "water policy" has been the leading factor of national development and was strongly emphasized by the

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1. In Thailand, the Mekong, while of some significance, is still only a border river. This situation might change after the construction of Pamong, a mainstream project.

representative of Cambodia at the twenty-second session of ECAFE in India, in April 1966:

> "If our Angkor sovereigns were able to build their empire on a prosperous economy this was due, among other things, to a large ingeniously devised irrigation infrastructure. At the present time, Cambodia under the able leadership of its Chief of State, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, remains faithful to this teaching and revives the principles of the "water policy". Indeed, everywhere in the country, civil servants, military personnel and farmers, are working on the construction of new reservoirs, dams, canals, ponds ..."[1]

Clearly, Cambodia's economic prosperity and political power rely on the Mekong river and its tributaries.

Laos has about three million people. Approximately, one quarter of them live in the mountain regions. All the rest make their home along the Mekong and its branches. The Lao people - like the Thais, Khmers and Vietnamese - cultivate wet-rice on the alluvial plains of the Mekong basin. The most important principalities have developed along the great river and it tributaries: Luang Prabang, the royal capital; Vientiane the administrative capital; Champassak and Xieng Khouang.

The Mekong means much more to Laos than it does to Thailand. For there are few dependable land roads and no railroads in Laos. The river furnishes the best available

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1. Report of the Thirtieth Session of the Mekong Committee, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L. 168 Rev.1, 18 April 1966, p. 39. See also Burchett, W.G., The Second Indochina War, N.Y.: International Publishers, 1970, p. 18-19 on "water conservation."

means of transportation. This importance was underscored by a study of inland navigation in the Lower Mekong Basin:

> "The Mekong river may be considered as a vital artery to Laos, in particular because of the country's geographical situation, and as the only means of communication for the majority of the population concentrated along the river bank ... At present, the Mekong river is the only surface transport link between the capital of Laos and Savannakhet, one of its major towns... The section Luang Prabang-Vientiane is vital to the ecoromy of the country. The villages along that stretch of the river have no other means of communication and during the rainy season, when the road is impassable and air transport highly irregular, it is the river traffic which saves the royal capital from being isolated."[1]

The history of Laos is the history of the Mekong dispute and the struggle for the domination of the Mekong valley. The political rise and decline of Laos was linked to the control over, and the loss of, the Mekong territories. Today, Laotian political factions of the right and the centre in power have managed to control most of the wet-rice growing country on the east bank of the Mekong, where the bulk of the Lao population lives. The left factions - led by Pathet Lao - that challenge this power have established their strongholds in the highlands near the North Vietnamese border.

The popular image of Vietnam as a pole balanced by two baskets of rice has a significance beyond that of the

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1. "Development of Inland Navigation in the Lower Mekong Basin", TAA/AFE/10, p. 3.

economic sphere. The pole which represents the Annamite Cordillera is a physical as well as a cultural barrier for its separates the countries of Indian culture - Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia - from that of Chinese civilization. The two baskets of rice are the two great and rich deltas formed by the Red River in the North and the Mekong River in the South. They support a very dense population. The two mighty rivers are vital elements in the political, economic and cultural evolution of Vietnam.

Indeed, the Vietnamese have always used their valleys as channels of expansion. Wet-rice cultivators, they chose to concentrate in the tiny lowland pockets, leaving the vast uplands to mountain tribes. This particular preference for the lowlands added to demographic pressure[1] was partly responsible for the historical "march to the South," "from one small rice-bearing delta to the next, until the next, until the wide-open plain of the Mekong was reached and put to the plow."[2] This situation was well analyzed by Alastair Lamb in his study of Asian frontiers:

> "The pattern of Viet population and Vietnamese civilization has to a great extent been determined by factors of economic geography.

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1. Thailand, Laos and Cambodia have never had population explosion. On the contrary, Laos and Cambodia might suffer from underpopulation.

2. Fall, B.B., The Two Vietnams, N.Y.: Praeger, 1964, p. 5

> The Viets dominate the rice-growing plains and deltas. They have never settled in hill tracts. Hence, except in the extreme South in the Mekong delta of South Vietnam and in the North in the Red River delta of North Vietnam, the Viets have tended, in effect to confine themselves to a narrow coastal strip in places but a few miles wide ... Today, both Vietnams - and particularly South Vietnam - are divided into two distinct cultural zones: The Viet lowlands and the non-Viet hill tracts."[1]

Vietnam has often been divided, not only culturally and economically but also politically. After the conquest of Champa in the South in the fifteenth century, the country was ruled by two rival dynasties - The Trinh in the North and the Nguyen in the South. In 1788, Vietnam was taken over by the three brothers from Tay Son who inevitably split it up into three parts. In 1802, unified by Emperor Gia-Long, the country was divided again by French colonization starting in 1858. Under French administration (1884-1946) Vietnam was divided into three regions with three different legal arrangements: Tonkin (direct protectorate), Annam (indirect protectorate), and Cochinchina (colony). Since 1954, following the Geneva Accords, the country has been divided into North and South at the seventeenth parallel. However, united or divided , the country's real centers of power have been Hanoi and Saigon, not Hue - the imperial capital.

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1. Lamb, A., Asian Frontiers, N.Y.: Praeger, 1968, pp.184-85.

In sum, hydraulic agricultural development accounts for the cultural, economic and political dominance of the lowland people in Indochina: the Thais in the Menam valley, the Laotians in the Lower Mekong, the Khmers in the region of Tonle Sap, and the Vietnamese in the Red river and the Mekong river deltas. Unquestionably, the Mekong river and its tributaries constituted the leading political economic and commercial power centers of the Indochinese Peninsula.

II.- Needs for an Integrated Mekong Basin Development

The Mekong river is the oly common factor unifying Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, whose backgrounds display more diversities and differences than similarities.

The topography of the four Mekong countries ranges from rugged mountains and upland plateaus to low, flat deltaic areas. Natural resources are equally abundant and diverse including rice, fish, rubber, tin zinc and many other mineral deposits. The total area of the four countries is some 1,165,000 square kilometers. Thailand is the largest covering an area of some 574,000 square kilometers. Laos has more than 236,800 followed by Cambodia with 181,000 and the Republic of Vietnam with about 173,200.[1]

The total population is some 55.4 million people, of whom it is estimated that 30.6 live in Thailand, 16.1 in the

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1. Atlas of Physical, Economic & Social Resources of the Lower Mekong Basin, United Nations, September 1968, p.v.

Republic of Vietnam, 6.1 in Cambodia, and only 2.6 in Laos.[1] Culturally, the Thai, the Lao, the Khmer and the Vietnamese are ethnically diverse, speak different languages, follow different customs and traditions, practice different religions or different branches of Budhism, and have different ways of thinking and acting.

Politically, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam gained their independence from France in 1954, whereas Thailand has never been under foreign rule. All four have different constitutional provisions. Thailand and Laos are formally kinddoms, whereas Cambodia (a kingdom until October 9, 1970) and Vietnam are republics. Economically, Thailand enjoys the highest level of development with a per capital GNP over $300, whereas Laos is the most underdeveloped country with $73.

The characteristics common to the four riparian countries are fewer but nonetheless important. First, the monsoonal climate effects them all. Agriculture still dominates the economy of the Mekong basin and employs the greater proportion of its labor force. Migration from rural to urban areas is of considerable magnitude, but the rapid growth of the urban centers is not yet matched by the growth of employment in the new industrial sector of each of the four countries.

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1. Atlas of Physical, Economic & Social Resources of the Lower Mekong Basin, United Nations, September 1968, p.v.

Politically, the electoral process has just started, military power reigns, and the threat of coups d'Etat is not absent. The people have not acquired political maturity yet. The mass of rural population is apolitical, indifferent or manipulated by a handful of leaders. Political consciousness is difficult to achieve so long as family loyalty or village identification prevails over State identity. Lastly, political instability is measured not only by violence, riots and demonstrations, but primarily by the fact that the central government is constantly and illegally challenged by revolutionary or opposition forces. The constant and permanent character of this struggle illustrates either the weakness and the lack of authority of the regime or/and the unpopularity of the official, and corrupt government.

Differences and similarities by themselves do not preclude cooperation among nations. In fact, the Lower Mekong development has often been singled out as a great example of economic cooperation among the four riparian states in spite of their historical rivalries and political animosities. It has been viewed as "a key to solving certain problems of the Lower Mekong riparians that stem from poverty and political instability."[1]

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1. Sewell, W. R. Derrick & White, Gilbert F., "The Lower Mekong," International Conciliation, May 1966, No. 558, p. 11.

Indeed, the need for the Mekong development is urgent and factors calling for the Mekong regional cooperation are numerous. First, almost all of Cambodia and Laos, nearly half of the Republic of Vietnam and nearly one third of Thailand lie within the Mekong Basin.

Second, about twenty-six million people, that is, half the population of the four riparian nations, live in the Mekong valley. At the estimated population growth rate figure of 3% per year there will be over 90 million people in the Mekong countries by the last decade of the century. But at the same time the production of rice has increased in recent years by only 2% per year.

Third, there exists a serious shortage of electric power which is extremely expensive in the four countries, particularly the Republic of Vietnam. The power rates in this region are substantially above those of more advanced countries, such as the United States. Consequently industrial activities cannot be promoted rapidly.

Last, but not least, modern technology constitutes the most powerful drive toward regional development and cooperation because it involves an enormous range of research disciplines, requires an extensive application of science and is applied more coherently to a geographic unit than to a political unit.[1] Particularly in international river

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1. Huddle, F.P., The Mekong Project: Opportunities & Problems of Regionalism, Prepared for the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, G.P.O., May 1972, p. 1.

development modern technology can assure an optimal and rational utilization of water, which in turn calls for co-operation on the part of the interested riparian states.

An integrated development of the Lower Mekong valley would be above all the application of modern technology to meet some regional problems and needs. Construction of dams, for example, would provide sufficient water for irrigation in view to expanding agricultural production, increase electric power capacity, reduce power costs and thereby stimulate industrial expansion. Storage of flood flows at projects along the mainstream and on major tributaries would overcome the flood problem, and also permit the extension of navigation further upstream and the development of maritime commerce.

In sum, new technology, the tremendous potentialities and resources of the Mekong river, the problems of providing an adequate food supply, the need for modernizing and raising the standard of living of the riparians, the lack of financial capital, the limited number of engineers, technicians and skilled workmen, and the low level of industry in each individual Mekong country, all require regional cooperation among riparian nations for good and sound economic development. And the Mekong river is the only stimulus for Mekong regional cooperation simply because it ties the four countries together in an indivisible way for better or for worse.

Chapter III

The Mekong Project

What promotes regional cooperation among the four Mekong riparian states? How does the Mekong Committee come about? What is the object of cooperation, or the work program, of the Committee? How do the riparian members participate in the Mekong Project? And, what are the other participants?

I.- Genesis of the Mekong Project

The Mekong Project came into existence fundamentally as a result of the activities of ECAFE and its Bureau of Flood Control and Water Resources Development set up in 1949. Among ECAFE's preoccupations the Mekong river received such special attention that the Bureau of Flood Control was requested to undertake a preliminary survey of the river. In May 1952, the Bureau published its "Preliminary Report on Technical Problems Relating to Flood Control and Water Resources Development of the Mekong - An International River,"[1] which stressed major opportunities for developing the river for power, irrigation and flood control. However, no further action was taken because of the fighting in French Indochina.

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1. ECAFE Document, Flood/8, 22 May 1952.

After the signature of the Geneva Accords on July 20, 1954, interest in the Mekong river was expressed not only by ECAFE but also by individual countries within and outside the region - particularly the United States, France and Japan.

In April 1955, at its Eleventh Session, the first following the Geneva Accords, ECAFE reiterated the importance it attached to its Secretariat study of international rivers, and renewed its approval for a reconnaissance survey of the Mekong river.

At about the same time the representatives of the US government conferred with officials of the four riparian states - Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam - on the need for a survey of the river. In November 1955, a Special Project Agreement was signed by the five parties, and almost immediately experts from the Bureau of Reclamation of the US Department of Interior were sent to the area to carry out the proposed field studies. In March 1956, a "Reconnaissance Report - Lower Mekong River Basin" came out and recommended some improvements in navigation on the mainstream and a few tributary projects in each of the four riparian countries. However, a minor incident - with a grave and unpredicted consequence - occurred, which prevented the US from going beyond its mere recommendations.

On February 8, 1956, a month before the publication of the report, the US International Cooperation Administration

convened a meeting of the four riparian countries to discuss the recommendations of the report and their eventual implementation. Cambodia refused to participate. Implicitly, Cambodia's absence meant that cooperation among the four Mekong states under the aegis of the United States was difficult, if not impossible. It was time for ECAFE to move in. Its first step encountered two stumbling blocks: the United States and the United Nations Headquarters.

Because of the scientific, technical and political American interests in the Mekong river, the US government did not want ECAFE to become operationally involved. In 1955 the Administration had obtained an appropriation from the US Congress for undertaking programs in the Mekong Basin. In his Report to Congress on the Mutual Security Program for the six months ended June 30, 1955, the President, among other things, pointed out the importance of the US assisting "cooperative survey of the development potentialities in the Mekong river." Consequently, the US view was that ECAFE should not undertake such field surveys.

On the other hand, the UN Headquarters, mainly the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Technical Assistance Administration, also objected to the ECAFE request for a comprehensive investigation of the Mekong Basin. In spite of those pressures, ECAFE went ahead with its plan. In February 1956, four international experts and consultants were drafted to assist the ECAFE Secretariat staff. In April this group carried out a field reconnaissance in

cooperation with the four riparian governments. Later in the year the group produced its report, "Development of Water Resources in the Lower Mekong Basin," subsequently printed, with a few amendments, in October 1957. The report, in addition to its technical findings, stressed the international character of the project and recommended the establishment of an international coordinating authority.[1]

Just before the thirteenth session of ECAFE to be held in March 1957 in Bangkok, the ECAFE report was circulated to its members for consideration. The ECAFE Thirteenth Session was an important date in the history of the Lower Mekong Development because it led to the foundation of the Mekong Committee. A review of the events is in order.

As at many other sessions of ECAFE, the item of water resources development was inscribed on the agenda at the thirteenth session. The difference was that this time the ECAFE members were asked to comment on a specific study prepared by the Secretariat. The study was on the "Development of Water Resources in the Lower Mekong Basin" and it was referred to as Document ECAFE/L.119.

When the study came up for discussion, it received a generally sympathetic reaction. Almost everybody praised the Secretariat for its work. The moment of truth came when Princess Souvanna Phouma introduced the following

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1. See the concluding section, "Need for International Control," of the report.

statement presented by the delegation of Laos jointly with the delegations of Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam:

"The delegations of the Lower Mekong riparian countries,

"Having studied the document ECAFE/L.119 entitled 'Development of Water Resources of the Lower Mekong Basin'

"Congratulate the Commission Secretariat for this work and particularly its Bureau of Flood Control and Water Resources Development,

"Consider that this study is of real usefulness for their economic development,

"Express the wish that such studies be continued jointly by the four countries concerned in order to determine with more detail in what measure the various projects concerning hydro-electric power, navigation, irrigation drainage and flood control can be of use to a number of countries."[1]

She explained that the above-mentioned delegations preferred to substitute the words "by a joint authority" which appeared in the first draft by the words "jointly by the four" on the ground that it was impossible in the present conditions to know exactly what shape such a joint authority might take and the time had not yet come to refer to it.[2]

Mr. Tran-Le-Quang, the representative of South Vietnam, emphasized the interdependence of the enterprise when he outlined a few basin principles. He said that it was not possible for example to take off anywhere a great volume

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1. Document ECAFE/24.

2. ECAFE, Official Records, Thirteenth Session, 18-28 March 1957, Bangkok, Thailand, E/CN.11/453, 22 May 1957 pp. 244-259.

of water without reducing considerably the low water discharge downstreams, with the result that salt water would back up deeper into the delta and jeopardize rice cultivation. Thus no project should lead to a decrease in low water flow. He stressed, then, the necessity of a joint survey entrusted to a common authority. The Mekong basin development projects should be executed according to a general plan. Priorities should be set up for the various projects to be conceived and implemented on a rational basis. The riparians should be warned against any isolated attempt at river development in a rash.[1]

The representatives of Cambodia and Thailand also spoke in favor of a joint action. Cambodia called upon the auspices of ECAFE for the continuation of studies, and Thailand asked for a close cooperation between the Bureau of Flood Control and the US International Cooperation Administration which had previously sponsored the study undertaken by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1956.[2]

Pursuant to the joint statement of March 1957 a meeting of representatives of the four riparian countries was convened in Bangkok, May 20-23, to consider in detail the report prepared by the ECAFE Secretariat on the "Development

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1. ECAFE, Official Records, Thirteenth Session, 18-28 March 1957, Bangkok, Thailand, E/CN.11/453, 22 May 1957.

2. ECAFE, Official Records, ibid.

of Water Resources in the Lower Mekong Basin." The meeting gave high priority to three mainstream projects: Pa Mong, Sambor and Tonle Sap. It recommended for the consideration by the four riparian governments of the formation of a Coordination Committee composed of representatives from each of the four states to carry out further studies on the Lower Mekong river.[1]

The recommendation was approved by the four governments. On September 16, 1957, a Preparatory Committee, composed of representatives of the four riparian countries, met in Bangkok for three days. It unanimously adopted the "Statute of the Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin," on September 17, 1957. The Mekong Committee was, thus, formally established and its first session was held in Phnom Penh, on October 31 and November 1, 1957. The session was inaugurated with an encouraging note from France which wished to participate in the financing of studies, for which she appropriated a sum of 60 million Francs out of her 1957 budget. With the adoption of the Statute and the appointment of the Mekong Committee, the Mekong Project materialized.

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1. "Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam Joint Meeting on the Lower Mekong Basin, Santitham Hall, 20-23 May, 1957: Conclusions & Recommendations," UN Document, ECAFE/WRD/1, 30 May 1957.

II.- Program of the Mekong Project

The Mekong development Project "seeks the comprehensive development of the water resources of the Lower Mekong Basin, including mainstream and tributaries, in respect of hydroelectric power development, irrigation, flood control, drainage, navigation improvement, watershed management, water supply and related developments, for the benefits of all the people of the basin, without distinction as to nationality, religion or politics."[1]

To attain this objective the work program of the Mekong Project has increasingly been expanded over the years. As Professors Sewell and White explained:

> "A gradual change has been evolving over the past nine years in the concept of the Mekong Scheme. At the outset it was envisioned as a multiple purpose program of water resources development, designed to promote hydroelectric power, irrigation, drainage, navigation, and flood control. Such development was to be accomplished mainly by the construction of dams and other control works. Today the scheme is viewed also as a means of accomplishing economic and social change. It embraces not only engineering works, but a wide variety of ancillary projects as well."[2]

Three survey missions were responsible for this evolution: The United Nations survey mission in 1957, the Japanese survey of the tributaries in 1959, and the Ford mission in 1961.

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1. On the first page of each Annual Report of the Mekong Committee

2. Sewell & White, op. cit., p. 53

The United Nations survey mission, or the Wheeler mission,[1] was organized by the United Nations Technical Assistance Administration (TAA) at the request of the Mekong Committee in November 1957. The main task of the mission was to prepare a program of studies and investigations for the orderly and speedy development of the basin, including the three most promising project sites - Pa Mong, Sambor and Tonle Sap - selected by the joint meeting of May 1957.

The UN survey mission arrived in Bangkok about mid-November, 1957, and completed its assignment by the end of January 1958. Its report, presented a month later, recommended a five-year program of studies and investigations of the main river and the major tributaries, giving first priority to the promising reaches in the main river within which the three selected projects are located. It also recommended that preliminary planning of projects in the main river should begin as soon as sufficient engineering

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1. The UN survey mission was headed by Lt. General R.A. Wheeler, formerly Chief of the US Corps of Engineers, and included international water resources development experts:
   - G. Duval of the Societe Grenobloise d'Etudes et d'Applications Hydrauliques of France
   - Yakata Kubota, President of the Nippon Koei K.K. of Japan.
   - J.W. McCammon, former Head of the Quebec Hydroelectric Commission of Canada
   - Kanwar Sain, Chairman of the Central Water & Power Commission of India
   - H.V. Darling of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

data had been collected whereas the planning of projects in major tributaries and other reaches of the main river could be undertaken subsequently.[1]

The central theme of the Wheeler mission has been that any development plan should be comprehensive and international. It should benefit the four riparian countries without being detrimental to any. Accordingly, it put a strong emphasis on the mainstream projects, particularly the Pa Mong, the Sambor and the Tonle Sap.[2] A brief description of these three projects will help grasp their significance and magnitude.

The Pa Mong project is situated some 24 kms upstream from Vientiane, where the Mekong forms the international boundary between Laos and Thailand. The project envisages the construction of dams on the Mekong mainstream and the Nam Mong and Nam Lik tributaries to create a reservoir with an active storage of 86 billion cubic meters, the installation of 4.8 million KW hydroelectric generating capacity, and the irrigation of 43,000 ha (11,420 in Laos, 31,580 ha

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1. See Programme of Studies and Investigations for Comprehensive Development of the Lower Mekong River Basin, UN Doc. TAA/AFE/3, 22 April 1958.

2. As of December 1969, twelve sites in total are singled out as possibilities for development. In addition to Pa Mong, Sambor and Tonle Sap, the nine other possible mainstream projects are: Pak Beng, Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Bung Kan, Thakhet, Khemarat, Pakse, Khone Falls, Stung Treng.

in Thailand). The estimated construction cost is $1,160 million.

The Sambor project is located in Cambodia North of Kratie about 225 kilometers upstream from Phnom Penh. It envisages the construction of a run-of-the-river power project which as an isolated project would have an installed capacity of 875 MW at an estimated cost of $358 million; if operated in conjunction with Pa Mong and Nam Ngum flow regulation upstream, however, it would have an installed capacity of 2,100 MW, at an estimated cost of $477.5 million.

The Tonle Sap project envisages the installation of a gated barrage across the Tonle Sap at Kompong Chhnang between the Great Lake and Phnom Penh. The barrage gates would be so operated as to reduce the intensity of the flood peak during the rainy season, and to provide adequate flow in the Mekong river in the dry season to facilitate navigation by ocean-going vessels between Phnom Penh and the sea. Like Pa Mong and Sambor, the Tonle Sap is a multiple purpose project dealing not only with flood control but also with navigation, irrigation, fish production, salinity control and (in conjunction with power from Sambor) the reclamation of the Plaine des Joncs and other parts of the Mekong delta.

Mainstream projects would certainly bring about spectacular economic and social changes in the Mekong region, and by the same token need closer cooperation among the riparians. However, they are extremely hard to realize, because they require a great deal of feasibility investigations, data

collection and analysis, planning studies and hundreds of billion dollars. As Professors Sewell and White assert, "the model of integrated river basin development described in the United Nations report ... is difficult to achieve in practice, particularly in developing countries."[1]

Therefore, some alternative must be devised to sustain and maintain cooperation among the four riparian nations during the planning period. The Japanese survey of major tributaries in 1959 had undoubtedly contributed toward this end. The development of tributaries is more feasible than that of the mainstream projects, because they are smaller in scale and much cheaper.

Actually, four out of the sixteen tributaries singled out by the Japanese reconnaissance survey in 1959 are in operation. They are Nam Pung and Nam Pong (completed in 1965 and 1966) in Thailand, Lower Se Done and Nam Ngum (completed in 1970 and 1971) in Laos. Four are in construction: Nam Don in Laos, Lam Dom Noi and Nam Phrom in Thailand, and Prek Thnot in Cambodia. About twenty other tributary projects are in various steps of study and investigation.

Of all tributary projects, the Nam Pong in Thailand and the Nam Ngum are worth mentioning because of their impact both on internal development and on regional cooperation. The Nam Pong is located in northeastern Thailand, some

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1. Sewell & White, op. cit., p. 49.

362 kilometers from Bangkok and 161 kilometers South of Vientiane, Laos. This is the poorest part of the country, and the Thai government in recent years has come to attach highest priority to this area in its economic development planning. The project is supposed to provide some 65 million kwh annually from its ultimate installation of 25,000 kilowatts, irrigation water for some 113,000 acres of land, flood control, fisheries development and recreational facilities. The Nam Pong project was inaugurated by the King of Thailand in March 1966.

As for the Nam Ngum project, it is located about 56 kilometers North of Vientiane and is expected to provide a generating capacity of 135,000 kw and irrigation water for some 79,200 acres of land. The foundation stone was laid by the King of Laos on February 23, 1970. The project was completed in December 1971.

Earlier, a Convention for the Supply of Power between Laos and Thailand was signed in August 1965 during the twenty-ninth session of the Mekong Committee, which held the view that "the optimum utilization of hydroelectric power through a harmonious cooperation between the two countries is of main interest for economic development."[1] The Convention was not only signed by the two parties primarily concerned, but also by Cambodia and the Republic of

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1. Preamble of the Convention.

Vietnam, and by the Executive Secretary of ECAFE and the Executive Agent of the Mekong Committee as well, as "parties directly interested in the comprehensive development of the Lower Mekong Basin."[1] Regional cooperation was symbolyzed by the power transmission line whose portion crossing the Mekong river became the property of the Mekong Committee whereas lines located in the respective territory of Laos and Thailand remained their own.[2]

As shown above, the UN survey in 1957 and the Japanese reconnaissance team in 1959 were only interested in physical, technical and engineering investigations. In 1961, the work program of the Mekong Development Project took on a new dimension when the Committee asked the Ford Foundation to undertake economic and social studies to determine what effects the development of the Mekong might have on the economic and social structure of the four basin countries.

The Ford survey mission, under the direction of Professor Gilbert F. White, addressed itself to four leading questions:

1/ What are the types of economic and social data and studies required in order to:

- Assess, in depth, feasibility in economic, fiscal social and administrative terms?

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1. Mekong Committee, "Draft Report of the 29th Session (Special)" UN Doc. E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.157/Rev. 1, 25 September 1965, p. 2

2. Wohlwend, Bernard J., Legal Aspects of Lower Mekong Basin Development, (WRD/MKG/INP/L.313/Rev.1, p. 50)

- Assess the anticipated economic and social benefits and to prepare for a full utilization of such benefits?
- Assess the economic, social and administrative aspects of each proposed mainstream projects?

2/ What types of national and international administrative arrangements are appropriate to assure efficient management of projects and programmes and equitable sharing of costs and benefits?

3/ How should the Committee and each of the four countries develop and strengthen staff capacity to undertake studies and analyses bearing upon the above questions?

4/ Insofar as present data permit, what appear to be the potentialities of short-term projects; and the long-term economic feasibility of the Mekong project in its entirety and its components, for the region as a whole, and for each of the four countries?[1]

The Ford mission's report came up with fourteen recommendations[2] and it filled a very important gap - the human aspect of development which thus far has been neglected.

Today, fourteen years after the establishment of the Project, the list of projects, studies and seminars is impressive. Of the last five-year plan's (1968-1972)[3] highlights, five projects hold a prticular interest because of their political problems. They are: the Prek Thnot project in Cambodia, the Nam Ngum project in Laos, the My-Thuan bridge (the first bridge across the Mekong river) and the Delta Project in South Vietnam, the Pa Mong mainstream

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1. White, G.F., de Vries, E., Dunkerley, H.B., & Krutilla, J.V., Economic and Social Aspects of Lower Mekong Development, Bangkok, 1962, p. iii.

2. Ibid., p. 79-102.

3. First Plan: 1959-1963; Second Plan: 1964-1968.

project between Thailand and Laos, and the Amplified Basin Plan covering all four riparian countries.

The Amplified Basin Plan, or rather the Indicative Basin Plan[1], is a document of extreme importance for the four Mekong countries. As it is recalled, the primary task of the Mekong Committee since its creation in 1957 has been the definition and amplification of an all Overall Basin Plan. The rationale for the establishment of such a Plan has been that,

> "Modern water resources management recognizes that choices must inescapably be made between power generation, irrigation, flood control and other project purposes; it also recognizes that, within a river basin, development at one site must be integrated with existing and proposed developments at other sites, if optimum benefits are to be achieved. In addition, the development of individual projects must be undertaken in an orderly fashion, with the priority of implementation determined on the basis of securing maximum benefit at minimum cost."[2]

The first draft of the "Report on Amplified Basin Plan: A Proposed Framework for the Development of Water and Related Resources of the Lower Mekong Basin" in two volumes was completed in June 1970 after seven years of work by the Mekong Secretariat and the ECAFE Division of Water Resources Development. The report "sets forth a framework for the

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1. The amendment of the title was proposed by the Advisory Board at its 14th session in September-October 1970, and endorsed by the Mekong Committee at its 48th session in October 1970.

2. Mekong Committee, Annual Report 1969, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L. 298 E/CN.11/901, p. 8.

progressive development of the water resources and related resources of the Lower Mekong Basin to meet the anticipated needs of the Basin during the next three decades." The Plan is of high interest and deep concern for the four riparian governments because national development, national planning and national interests are at stake. Such an ambitious program could not have been carried out without riparian cooperation and international assistance.

III.- Participants of the Mekong Project

The Mekong Project involves a considerable number of participants ranging from the International Organization and its specialized agencies to different governments and private companies. The nature of participation has also been very diversified, covering areas ranging from manpower to financial and material aid. To simplify the picture, we will divide the participants into four categories: 1/ the riparians, 2/ those who participate in the organizational structure, that is, the Advisory Board, the Executive Agent, and the Secretariat, 3/ the UN agencies, and 4/ the donor countries and private foundations.

The striking feature of riparian participation is not its scope or size but its growth and expansion over the years. Besides sending their representatives to the Mekong Committee which acts as the "Board of Directors" of the Mekong Project, the four riparian states increasingly participate in the operational resources and in the work of the Secretariat.

Financial contribution of riparian states has remarkably stepped up during the past decade. In June 1960, riparian contribution was $1,284,000 out of $8,537,100; in 1965, it represented one third of the total sum; at the end of December 1969, it amounted to $89,147,679 out of $197,891,404 or about 45 per cent of the operational resources; and as of December 31, 1971, the total of $214,781,614 was made up of $93,168,901 contributed by riparian governments, compared with $121,612,713 granted or loaned by donor countries, UN agencies and other organizations.

Coupled with this financial effort, there has been an attempt to fill the Mekong Secretariat's professional staff posts with persons from the Mekong countries. In 1966, 10 of the 24 Secretariat core professional posts, or 41 per cent, were filled by officers from the four riparian nations. At the end of 1969, 16 of the 30 Secretariat core professional posts were filled by riparian nationals. Furthermore, in April 1972, the Mekong Committee formally established the Mekong Cadre, or the core of the Mekong Secretariat in the future. The staff members of the Mekong Cadre will be employed by the Committee on behalf of the participating governments and will receive salaries and conditions of service commensurate with their qualifications and international riprian status.

Another illustration of riparian participation is the important role played by the four national Mekong Committees

in coordinating national and regional needs and problems. Each riparian country has set up a national Mekong Committee, in which all ministries and governmental departments concerned are represented as an important link in the chain of policy formulation.

The second main group of participants makes up the organizational structure of the Mekong Committee. It is composed of an Advisory Board, an Executive Agent, a Secretariat and three Mekong area offices in riparian countries which do not house the Mekong Secretariat.

The Advisory Board of International Experts was set up on the Wheeler Mission's recommendation in order to assist the Mekong Committee on technical engineering and professional matters. In December 1958, three outstanding engineers were appointed for the first time by the Committee: Paul Bourrieres of France, Kanwar Sain of India[1], and Carl G. Paulsen of the United States. In 1960, an economist, Arthur Karasz of the United States, was added to the Advisory Board, and in 1961 Sir Robert G.A. Jackson of United Kingdom joined it. In 1970, the members of the Board were: Eugene Black (USA), Paul Bourrieres, chairman (France), Arthur Gaitskell (U.K.), Robert Jackson (U.K.), Narayan Prasad (India), Filemon Rodriguez (Philippines), Kanwar Sain (India),

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1. He was the Director of Engineering Services, Mekong Secretariat, before joining the Advisory Board.

Hart Schaaf (USA), Gengo Suzuki (Japan), and Victor Umbricht (Switzerland). This brought the membership from the original three to ten. In September 1969 General R.A. Wheeler was invited by the Committee to serve as an honorary member of the Board.

The Advisory Board's terms of reference provide that the Board shall meet twice a year to "advise the Mekong Committee ... on any question as may be submitted to it by the Committee or its Executive Agent. The Board may also examine as it deems necessary and with the consent of the Committee, any aspect of the work carried out under the auspices of the Committee."[1] At the forty-third Session of the Committee in October 1969, the Mekong Committee, in consultation with the United Nations, amended the Board's terms of reference to provide that appointments to the Board shall, from 1970, be for the three-year, renewable, terms.[2]

The post of Executive Agent was created at the December 1958 session in Bangkok. The role of the Executive Agent was to assist the Mekong Committee and to maintain liaison with ECAFE and other UN agencies. His responsbilities and his working relation with ECAFE were clearly defined at the following session in Vientiane, in March 1959. First, he would advise the Committee and the four governments on the administrative and technical coordination of plans for the

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1. The Mekong Committee, Annual Report 1969, p. 119.
2. Ibid.

overall development of the basin. Second, he would assist the Committee in carrying out the day-to-day coordination of the engineering and economic studies and would report to the Committee at regular intervals on the progress of the work. Third, in the performance of these studies he would be constantly in contact with the ECAFE Secretariat and be subject to the direction and guidance of the Executive Secretary of ECAFE in regard to policy matters.

From 1964, when the first United Nations-Special Fund Institutional Support was granted to the Mekong Committee, the Executive Agent (who was appointed legally by the Committee but financed practically by UNDP/Special Fund) became, for the duration of the Institutional Support Project, the Project Manager of that Project, reporting directly not only to the Mekong Committee but also to the Executive Agency, that is, the United Nations acting through ECAFE. In other words, he is both the Executive Agent of the Mekong Committee and the Project Manager of UNDP and has to report to two bosses. Dr. C. Hart Schaaf, formerly a Deputy Executive Secretary of ECAFE, was the first Executive Agent of the Mekong Committee for ten years (May 1959-November 1969). He was replaced by Mr. Van Der Oord who was proposed by the UNDP Administrator and accepted by the Mekong Committee. Mr. Van Der Oord took office on December 1, 1969. Also, in fulfillment of a recommendation of the 1967 UNDP review mission an Associate Executive Agent was appointed in March 1969. Mr. Shigeru Inada held

this post until mid-1970.

The Executive Agent heads a small staff of technical experts and administrative officers. The office of the Executive Agent had only four professional posts in 1959, all provided by ECAFE. It has grown into a secretariat of more than 60 professional posts in 1970. At present, the Mekong Secretariat includes four main divisions: 1/ Engineering Services, 2/ Navigation Improvement, 3/ Economic and Social Studies and 4/Agriculture (created in January 1970). It has also an Administrative Section.

About half of the Mekong Secretariat professional staff was made up of riparians in 1970. The other half came from countries outside the region. As already mentioned, at the end of 1970 the Secretariat professional staff numbered 66, of whom 33 were riparians. And of the total 66, 50 were provided under the UNDP Institutional Support Project, 5 were provided by ECAFE, and the remaining eleven were provided by the following cooperating countries and agencies: Belgium (1), Netherlands (5), the United States (3), UNICEF (1), and the Ford Foundation (1).

The Mekong Secretariat has undertaken the coordination of data collection and project investigations, contributed technical assistance, and sought funds for the implementation of the Committee's program. It has been closely linked to the ECAFE Secretariat, and its Division of Water Resources Development.

So far, the Mekong Secretariat has been located in Bangkok, on the understanding that anyone of the riparian countries may, if it wishes and is able to provide facilities, host the Mekong Secretariat. Recently, the Committee has agreed in principle to establish area offices (subordinate to the Mekong Secretariat) in other riparian countries, to give a measure of decentralization. The first area office of the Mekong Secretariat was established in Phnom Penh in 1969; area offices in Saigon and Vientiane were set up in October 1971.

The third group of participants is composed of the United Nations agencies whose contributions vary from financial assistance to investigation studies or reports on agriculture forestry, fisheries and other aspects related to the Lower Mekong Development. At present, seventeen UN agencies participate directly or indirectly in the Mekong Project: ECAFE, UNDP/SF, UNOTC, ITU, IAEA, IBRD, ILO, FAO, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, WMO, WFP, UNIDO, Asian Highway, the Asian Institute for Economic Development and Planning and the Asian Development Bank.

The last category of participants comes from financing nations and private foundations and firms. At this writing, twenty-six countries have pledged their contributions. France, Japan, New Zealand and the United States were the first donors. By December 31, 1970, the United States was the first largest contributor, the Federal Republic of

Germany ranked second, and Japan came third.[1] Of the 26 participating countries the United States and Canada represent the American continent, 12 come from Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom), 3 from the Middle East (Iran, Israel, and the United Arab Republic), and 9 from Asia (Australia, Republic of China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan and the Philippines). Three Southeast Asian countries (Burma, Malaysia and Singapore), all members of the United Nations and ECAFE, chose not to join this Southeast Asian subregional Project.

Assistance from the non-basin countries has several forms. It could be bilateral or multilateral; it could be in dollars (or the equivalent), in kind (boats, cement, or even food) or in technical assistance (soil surveys, sedimentation studies or mineral investigations); it could be in loans or grants and direct appropriations.

In general, most of the aid offered by the interested governments is administered bilaterally, even though it is given in the name of a UN-sponsored operation. In some cases, even if the aid is donated to the Mekong Committee, the donors make their preferences explicit: Pakistan and China, for example, had asked the Committee that their aid

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1. The United States contributed $36,598,176, Germany $$17,002,500 and Japan $15,258,465 by December 31, 1970.

be used for projects in Thailand and South Vietnam, and the Committee had acted accordingly. The Committee, however, has always tried to balance the requirements of all the projects by tapping new sources or by diverting available resources to those projects that need assistance.

In addition to the donating governments, a dozen of private foundations and companies figure in the Mekong Project. The foundations involved in the Lower Mekong Development number five: the Asia Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Magsaysay Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Resources for the Future, Inc., and there are about ten business companies or private firms that have given assistance to the Committee.

The list of contributors and the amount of contribution might look very impressive. However, given the gigantic nature of international river development financial aid will be one the major problems to be faced by the Mekong Committee in the coming years.

Chapter IV

The Mekong Committee in Operation

This chapter will examine the organization and operation of the Mekong Committee. In the first section we will study the structure, functions and powers of the Committee both in theory, as determined by the statute, and in practice, as performed throughout the years. In the second section we will analyze the functioning of the Committee both in terms of cooperation and conflicts. We will attempt to determine the incentives for cooperation and causes of conflicts.

I.- Organization of the Mekong Committee

The Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin - known as the Mekong Committee - was established in 1957 by the Statute of the Committee. That was drafted by the Office of Legal Affairs at United Nations Headquarters, in New York. The Statute was then adopted on September 17 at the meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the four governments, in Bangkok, amended on October 31 at the first session of the Mekong Committee, in Phnom Penh, and finally approved by the four riparian governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam.

The Statute of the Mekong Committee is a rather succinct and simple document. It has six chapters, eight articles and six headings (one for each chapter):

a/ establishment of the Committee, b/ organization, c/ co-operation with the Secretariat of the Commission (ECAFE), d/ functions, e/ sessions, and f/ general provisions.

The Mekong Committee is composed of four members, one from each participating government, with plenipotentiary authority (article I). The chairmanship of the Committee shall be held in turn by the members of the Committee, the alphabetical order of the member countries. Each member shall hold office for one year (article 2).

Article 3 stipulates that the Secretariat of ECAFE shall cooperate with the Committee in the performance of the Committee's functions. Article 4 specifies those functions which are "to promote, coordinate, supervise and control the planning and investigation of water resources development projects in the Lower Mekong Basin."

The most important provision of the Statute concerns what we call the "veto power" of the Committee members. It was added to the Statute which was originally drafted by legal experts at the United Nations in New York who did not include any such provision in the Statute. Consequently, at the first session of the Mekong Committee in Phnom Penh, on October 31, 1957, the four riparian representatives insisted on adding two fundamental stipulations providing first that "meetings of the Committee shall be attended by all participating countries,"[1] and second that "decisions

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1. Underlined by the writer.

of the Committee shall be unanimous."[1] The riparians inserted these two stipulations to provide more than just a negative veto power for each member to protect its own national interests. The unanimity principle of the four riparians was designed (a) to put the four participating countries on an equal footing regardless of their size, population and resources, (b) to stress the interdependence of integrated Mekong Basin Development, and (c) to respect the sovereignty and national interests of each member country. Thus theoretically close cooperation among the four governments would be a necessary prerequisite for an efficient and effective Mekong Committee. The "veto power" granted to each member country could make the Mekong Committee either extremely powerful or completely pwerless with no intermediate alternative.

The other clauses of the Statute provide that the Executive Secretary of ECAFE or his representative may at any meeting make either oral or written statements concerning any questions under consideration (article 5.4); that the Committee shall submit reports to participating governments and annually to ECAFE (article 6); that the Committee may invite representatives of governments and of specialized agencies to attend meetings of the Committee in the capacity of observers (article 7); that the Statute of the Committee

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1. Underlined by the writer.

shall not in any way effect, supersede or modify any of the agreements which are presently in force or which may be hereafter concluded between any of the interested governments relating of the Mekong river (article 8.1); and that amendments to the Statute which may be proposed by any participating government, shall be examined by the Committee and shall take effect when approved by all[1] participating governments.

In March 1962, Article 4 of the Statute was revised by the four member countries in order to better cope with the rapid growth of external assistance and the substantial amount of project equipment handed over to the recipient countries without proper procedure. The amendment was to give the Committee rights (a) to get technical and financial assistance from other sources than those contained in the Statute, and (b) to have access to property. Thus, under the new terms of the amendment the Committee could both "make requests on behalf of the participating governments for special financial and technical assistance and receive and administer separately such financial and technical assistance, and take title to[2] such property, as may be offered under the technical assistance programme of the United Nations, the specialized agencies and friendly

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1. Underlined by the writer.
2. Those underlined are the new terms of reference.

governments, or other organizations."[1] The amendment was formally submitted for ratification to the Foreign Ministers of the four riparian countries by the Executive Secretary of ECAFE in his letter of 16 April 1962, and formally approved successively by Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and the Republic of Vietnam between April 30 and August 2, 1962.[2]

In addition to the Statute, it is laid down in the Rules of Procedure that ordinary sessions of the Committee shall be held regularly three times a year, and special meetings at any time on the request of one or more of the Committee members or of the ECAFE Executive Secretary (rule 1); that all meetings shall be closed meetings unless the Committee decides otherwise (rule 3); that the ECAFE Executive Secretary shall send out invitations to the meeting (rule 2), and may be requested by the Committee to make necessary arrangements for consultation, including the preparation of documents, the holding of meetings and the drafting of records (rule 4); and that in the event of any matter arising which has not foreseen by the present Rules, the pertinent rules of ECAFE shall be applied, provided they are deemed suitable for the purpose of the Committee

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1. Those underlined are the new terms of reference.

2. The same procedure was followed for the ratification of the Committee Statute which had been submitted to the Foreign Ministers of the four member countries by the Executive Secretary of ECAFE.

(rule 5). The Rules of Procedure were adopted by the Committee at its first session in October 1957 without any revision.

Of those provisions and rules the most essential pertain to a/ the role of ECAFE, b/ the unanimity principle, c/ the scope of activities, and d/ the functions of the Committee. Clearly, both the Statute and the Rules of Procedure put a great emphasis on the role of ECAFE, which will be analyzed in details in Chapter VIII. In the following pages we will examine only points b, c and d, and try to show how they are worked out in practice.

A/ The Unanimity Principle

One could fairly say that without ECAFE the Mekong Committee would never have existed, and without the "veto power" the Mekong Committee would not have survived. Indeed, its first step at its first session was to grant the "veto power" to each member by amending the original Statute which provided that a "quorum for any meeting shall be constituted by three members," and the "decisions of the Committee shall be a consensus of the members present." Instead of this majority rule , the Committee's members "unanimously" adopted the unanimity principle which required that "meetings of the Committee shall be attended by all participating countries," and "decisions of the Committee shall be unanimous," as already pointed out. In other words, each member country has the power to say "no" and veto any decision and make his views and rights

respected. As stated earlier, the veto power represents three political realities: equality in cooperation,[1] interdependence in development and respect of national sovereignty.

More important than its role to preserve equality, interdependence and sovereignty of the Committee's members, are the functions of the veto power. Like most tools the veto power is a double-edged instrument which could be both dangerous and useful. It could paralyze or accelerate the functioning of the Committee. It could delay or promote cooperation. It could strengthen or disintegrate regional organization and its ties.

In practice, the interpretation of the veto power has been less categorical and less rigid than might have been the case. Far from blocking the system, the veto power created a climate of self-assurance and of mutual confidence which was so needed especially during the first years of the Mekong cooperation . This point was confirmed by Mrs. Virginia Wheeler,[2] a legal advisor to the Mekong Committee, who made a study of the Mekong Committee in 1969 in which she positively remarked that, "The unanimity

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1. According to the popular and democratic "One man one vote" or "One country one vote" regardless of its size, population and resources.

2. Wife of Lt. General R. Wheeler who headed the UN Survey Mission in 1957 upon the Mekong Committee's request.

rule and 100% quorum requirements of the existing Mekong Committee Statute have played a substantial part in fostering confidence and cooperation among the member countries."[1] This view was largely shared by riparians and other people who have been involved in this big enterprise.

Another interpretation of the unanimity principle was found in February and April 1967 when Cambodia boycotted the two Committee's sessions to show off its impatience and irritation with financing problem of the Prek Thnot project. "This situation," wrote Bernard Wolwend, a legal officer of the Mekong Secretariat, "caused the first interpretation of the Statute to be made and, more particularly, that of Article V which provides for the unanimity rule for the Committee to exercise its decision-making power."[2] The practical interpretation was rather flexible. It was decided that, "In the light of the Committee's Statute, Article V, the absence of one Member renders the decisions of the Session subject to subsequent ratification by the absent Member."[3] Effectively, after the reports of both sessions were provisionnally approved by the three members present (Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam) and

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1. Wheeler, V.M., The Mekong Committee: A look into the Future, WRD/MKG/INF/L.322/Rev. 1, 3 Oct. 1969, p. 19.

2. Wolwend, B.J., Legal Aspects of Lower Mekong Basin Development WRD/MKG/INF/L.313/Rev. 1, 15 Sept. 1969, p. 55.

3. Doc. E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.188, 6 Feb. 1967, para. 1.1.

since Cambodia never objected to the terms of those reports, they were accordingly regarded as having been adopted "unanimously" by the four members.

Two interesting cases of "veto power" are worth mentioning because they illustrate the flexibility, the informality and the style of decision-making power of the Mekong Committee. The first deals with the amendment of the Statute in 1965, and the second occurred recently at the January 1971 Plenary Meeting in Vientiane[1] when the Vietnamese delegation "vetoed" the publication of the Indicative Basin Plan at a closed session.

In May 1965 an amendment of the Statute pertaining to the name and functions of the Committee was proposed by its members to better reflect the broadening of the Committee's functions and activities which included not only coordination of investigations of Mekong mainstream and tributary projects but also actual construction and ancillary measures such as agricultural and industrial development, road and rail transport, public health and social affairs.[2]

At the Committee's request the terms of the amendment were prepared by the Mekong Secretariat and read as follows:

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1. The writer was present at that meeting.
2. E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.149 Rev. 1, 11 May 1965, p. 2.

1. Title: original	Title: to be amended
Committee for Co-ordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin	Committee for Co-ordination of Comprehensive Development of the Lower Mekong Basin.[1]
2. Functions: original	Functions: to be amended
Article 4: The functions of the Committee are to promote, coordinate, supervise and control the planning and investigation of water resources development projects in the Lower Mekong Basin. To these ends the Committee may:	The functions of the Committee are, when requested to do so by the country or countries concerned,[2] to promote, coordinate, supervise and control the planning, investigation, construction and operation of water resources development projects in the Lower Mekong Basin, and other development projects related thereto. To these ends the Committee may:
a/ prepare and submit to participating governments plans for carrying out co-ordinated research, study and investigation	a/ prepare and submit to participating governments plans for carrying out co-ordinated research, study, investigation, construction and operation

The amendment had no bearing whatsoever upon the unanimity rule, or "veto power," and the non-political technical

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1. Another suggestion was to simply call it "The Mekong Development Committee."

2. This was added at the 30th Session in April 1966 after the letters of ratification were sent out. But "as this phrase was a limiting classification which did not add any powers, the Committee felt that the letters of ratification already received from some of the Mekong Committee member countries covered this additional phrase and felt that the Executive Secretary of ECAFE could notify the governments concerned accordingly"- E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.168 Rev. 1, 18 April 1966, p.p. 17-18.

character of the Mekong Committee which should and will work "for the benefit of all the people of the Lower Mekong Basin without distinction as to politics or nationality." It was "unanimously" approved by the four members at the following session in August 1965 and formally transmitted for ratification to the four riparian Foreign Ministers by the ECAFE Executive Secretary in a letter dated August 24, 1965. But, while the other three riparians approved, it then failed to get the Cambodian government's ratification for reasons not made public. The amendment remained a dead letter not by a veto at the Committee's meeting but at home, in Phnom Penh.

The second case is much simpler and less important but perhaps more typical of the Mekong Committee's style of negotiation. At the fiftieth Plenary Session of the Committee in Vientiane discussion on the draft of the Indicative Basin Plan was on the agenda, and its eventual publication waited for the Committee's approval to be given at that session. This point was stressed by Mr. Van der Oord, the Acting Executive Agent of the Mekong Committee, in his opening statement:

> "First of all, then, there is our Indicative Basin Plan Report. We have found that the Secretariat can, with its own resources and with help available to it from outside, produce quite a respectable indicative planning document. There is every reason to believe that we shall be able to issue the first edited version in printed form within a year."[1]

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1. Statement made on January 27, 1971. The writer was there.

When it was the turn of the four riparian representatives to speak only the member for Vietnam talked at length (nearly half of his speech) about the Plan whereas the other three members did not even mention it in their opening statements. Moreover, the Vietnamese representative's words referring to the Plan were rather nice, laudatory and encouraging:

> "Apres de nombreuses annees de travail ardu, un rapport sur ce Plan a pu etre acheve... Particulierement au Vietnam, je peux dire qu'a cette occasion il s'est produit un reveil spontane d'une attention et d'un enthousiasme grandissant de tous nos techniciens sur ce qui se fait au sein du Comite..."[1]

The Committee decided that the working session on the Indicative Basin Plan should be closed to include only the four riparian delegations, the Advisory Board, the Executive Agent and some officers of the Mekong Secretariat. UN specialized agencies, donor governments, private foundations and firms were excluded. At this closed session the Vietnamese representative firmly opposed the publication of the Plan on the grounds that facts, data, and statistics on Vietnam were wrong and inaccurate.

These two cases of what we call "veto power" reveal many aspects of the Committee's decision-making process. First, in general terms there has been no formal veto in public session but rather firm objection in closed session,

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1. Discours d'ouverture du Chef de la delegation de la Rep. du Vietnam. Document distributed during the Session.

no direct confrontation in public session but rather private consultation during which decisions were made and then confirmed by public statements.

Second, some provisions were devised to avoid blatant confrontation[1] between the Committee members thereby allowing a certain flexibility in their negotiations. In the first case, ratification by the four governments was required for an amendment to take effect, although ratification was not provided in the Statute of the Committee. This provision could be viewed as a "safety valve" for a Committee member to escape under the overwhelming pressure of his colleagues without creating too much embarrassment and tension within the Committee.

In the second case, closed sessions were provided by Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure partly to make up for the intransigence of the unanimity rule. It is much easier to say "no" in a closed and small meeting among colleagues and friends than in a public and large audience composed of donor countries, rich bankers and international experts who give the impression to "judge" you more than "understand" you, as one riparian put it.

All in all, the unanimity principle has had a great psychological effect in bringing about confidence and

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1. This is typical of Asian style of negotiation. Also, decisions are made by consensus rather than by majority.

cooperation. However, confidence and cooperation between the Committee members are not yet strong and mature enough to go along without the unanimity principle. So far the veto power has been a psychological and moral asset more than anything else. And for this reason alone, it should not be abolished.

B/ Scope of Activities of the Mekong Committee

The definition of the Committee activities is another feature of the Statute. As indicated by the Committee's name "The Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin," the emphasis is on "coordination of investigations," and the type of activities is related to "water resources development" (article 4). However clear this definition seemed to be in 1957, it has raised some problems along with the progress of the Committee's activities.

On the one hand, those limitations are unrealistic for two reasons. The first reason deals with a pertinent question: Coordination of investigations for what end? - if not for construction, operation or development purposes. The second reason deals with the illusive belief that water resources development can be isolated and exploited exclusively, as cogently refuted by Mrs. Wheeler:

> "Agriculture, forestry, industry, transport communications, education, public health, the economic, political and social life of the region and its ecology - all these and more affect, and are affected by, water resources projects. Planning

> for water resources development cannot be divorced from planning for other resources and purposes."[1]

On the other hand, those limitations no longer correspond with the reality. The Committee activities have gone far beyond the "coordination of investigations." Four dams are constructed and in operation in Thailand and Laos. This should be expected after fourteen years of activities. What is surprising is that the provisions of the Statute have not been changed to respond to new needs and realities.[2]

C/ Powers and Functions of the Mekong Committee

Closely linked to the scope of activities is the attribution of powers and functions invested in the Mekong Committee to carry out those activities. Again the gap between theory and practice gets wider and wider.

According to the Statute, the functions of the Mekong Committee are to "promote, coordinate, supervise and control the planning and investigation of water resources development projects of the Lower Mekong Basin" (Article 4). To discharge their functions the Committee's members have been given plenipotentiary and veto powers and specific means which include a/ the preparation of "plans for carrying out

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1. Wheeler, V.M., The Mekong Committee: A Look into the Future, WRD/MKG/INF/L.322/Rev.1, Oct. 3, 1969, p. 2.

2. An amendment to the Statute was proposed to change the name and functions of the Committee in May 1965, but it failed to get the ratification of the Cambodian government.

coordinated research and investigations," b/ the obtaining and administering of external assistance as well as the right to ownership, and c/ the drawing up of criteria for water resources development (same Art. 4). Thus, the 1957 Mekong Committee - a "Board of Directors" with "plenipotentiary authority" - was intended to be not a mere discussion group or a forum for debate but a body with powers to decide and act. However, under the terms of Article 4 of the Statute the 1957, the Mekong Committee assumed mainly, if not only, supervisory functions which reduced the Committee to a consultative and coordinating body or "a clearinghouse for information" to use Mrs. Wheeler's terminology.

In practice, however, plenipotentiary and veto powers have not been used extensively whereas the Committee's functions have been expanded substantially. So far, vetoes have not been cast frequently (to the best of our knowledge twice), and plenipotentiary authority of the members has been limited to technical matters and somehow weakened by the "ratification" requirement for decisions to take effect, as seen in the case of the 1965 Amendment proposal. The "ratification" requirement could be both a "safety valve" and a "strangle hold" for a representative depending upon his own relationship and communications with the government which he represents.

As to its functions, even if it is "a clearinghouse for information" the Committee has gone "beyond what is usually

regarded as the planning and investigation stage of projects."[1] Actually, the Committee's members have been engaged in project construction although "such a function has not yet been effectively sanctioned by law."[2] They have co-signed agreements covering an international exchange of power between Laos and Thailand, and conventions governing the reciprocal supply of building materials, not to mention earlier tax-exemption agreements with third states in respect of technical assistance services and supplies. Also, they have made a few policy decisions relating to the control of low water discharge in 1957, and to navigation in 1964 when the building of a bridge over the Mekong river at My-Thuan, in Vietnam, was discussed.[3]

Yet, as shown from the above analysis, the growth and expansion of the Mekong Committee in its organization and functions have been brought about without a major change in the 1957 Statute of the Committee. This transformation was

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1. Wheeler, V.M., doc. cit., p. 3.

2. Wolwend, B.J., op. cit., p. 70.

3. The two principles on low water discharge are:
   a/ as a result of the projects recommended, the existing low water discharge of the Mekong would not be reduced in any way at any of the sites; and
   b/ the supplies to be diverted for irrigation purposes would be met by storage of flow during high stages of the river.

facilitated by two facts. First, there was the character of the Statute itself. Its shortness and simplicity have allowed flexibility in interpretation, as we already noted earlier.

Second, only tributary projects of national concern and responsiblity have been developed. Mainstream projects still remain at the level of investigatory and planning functions of the Mekong Committee. Cooperation among the four Mekong countries has been mostly concentrated on national sovereignty.

II.- Mekong Regional Cooperation and Conflicts

As defined in the first chapter, regional cooperation means "partnership for mutual benefits." These two pillars of "partnership" and "mutual benefits" have set the foundation of the Mekong regional cooperation, as described by this metaphor which the riparian members like to use to explain their cooperation:

> "We sometimes say within the international Mekong Committee that the tremendous resources of this great river resemble a treasure chest full of gold, but a treasure chest containing four locks and four keys; the Mekong treasure chest can only be opened by Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam harmoniously using, each her own key, to open each her own lock, whereby the lid of the chest can then be lifted up for the benefit of all."[1]

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1. Dr. Binson, "Thailand's Role in the Mekong Project," Thailand Economic & Industrial Review, 1968, A Supplement of the Bangkok Post, p. 105

Thus, partnership requires not only four locks and four keys, but also their harmonious and joint use. This means equality in cooperation - each member has his own lock and own key - and interdependence in development, which were both embodied in the unanimity principle of the Mekong Committee.

Mutual benefits include "the benefits not only of the individual country members, but also of all the four Governments taken as a single entity."[1] In other words, benefits of the Mekong Project have two dimensions: national and regional. National benefit, as explained by Dr. Binson, means that "a Thai inevitably is interested first and foremost in what an undertaking like the Mekong Project can mean in tangible terms for his own country."[2] Indeed, national interest in regional cooperation is a strong factor that should be taken into account. In January 1971, when asked by the writer to cite the happiest event in the history of the Mekong Committee each riparian member named its first own dam: Nam Pong for Thailand, Nam Ngum for Laos, and Prek Thnot for Cambodia. As for regional benefit, it is "the benefit of all four of the Lower Mekong riparian states, i.e. Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam."[3] Dr. Binson argued that,

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1. Dr. Binson, "Thailand's Role in the Mekong Project," Thailand Economic & Industrial Review, 1968, A Supplement of the Bangkok Post, p. 105.

2. Dr. Binson, Art. Cit., p. 105

3. Ibid.

> "This conception of regional benefit, although altruistic and idealistic, is also technical. The potential benefits of an international river such as the Mekong are such that they can only be fully utilised on the basis of cooperation among the countries."[1]

Benefits are of importance in cooperative situations. They account for cooperation, competition or conflict within the group. They may improve or impair group performance. They strengthen the spirit of cooperation or engender crisis of cooperation. Let us also recall that "mutual benefits" need not mean an equal share in benefits, since the size, location, and contribution of a country member can be a basis for distributing benefits unevenly.

Since the development of an international river basin is always onerous and financial means are rather limited, project selection and project financing constitute two sensitive problems which impose constraints upon the good relationship among the group members. The Mekong Committee did not escape these two difficulties of selecting and financing the projects in the Lower Mekong Basin, as demonstrated by the arguments about the Nam Ngum, Prek Thnot and My-Thuan projects, as national benefits, and the controversies over the Pa Mong, Sambor and the Indicative Basin Plan, as regional benefits.

The tremendous cost of projects on one hand, and the short supply in operational resources on the other,

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1. Dr. Binson, Art. Cit., p. 105

necessitate a rational choice of projects. However, the criteria in project selection and priority are by no means simple. Should the Mekong Committee recommend only those projects that met a certain standard of economic efficiency? Or should it take into account the extent to which the various projects are likely to promote regional development or reduce international tensions?[1]

In simpler terms, has the Mekong Committee chosen a project for its national or regional benefits, for national development or regional cooperation, for economic or political reasons? There is no easy and clear answer. Instead, the lack of common policy and agreed-upon criteria in project selection by the Committee members has created at times an atmosphere of mutual distrust delaying or precluding any real progress in cooperation. This is where the conflicts come from, particularly because each country "tries to defend its own interest, and each says that its own projects are most important," as one riparian official candidly conceded.

Since its inception the Mekong Committee has not been able to reach an agreement on criteria in project selection. During the investigation stage the problem was not acute since it was agreed that the whole river should be explored and nothing was concrete or "tangible" yet. But when the

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1. Sewell & White, op. cit., p. 58.

projects reached the construction stage, decisions should have been made concerning their economic efficiency and/or their capacity for strengthening regional cooperation.

In 1959, reversing the Wheeler Mission's recommendations on international mainstream projects which would bring about regional benefits and increase regional cooperation among riparian countries, the Mekong Committee gave priority to national tributary projects in individual countries apparently for both purposes of national development and regional cooperation. As Professors Sewell and White contended, "in some cases tributary projects will provide a basis for cooperation among riparians that can be built upon at a later stage, when the larger projects are ready for construction."[1] In reality, the timing of the construction of the Nam Pong and Nam Ngum dams indicated that they were chosen more for psychological and other reasons than for economic needs. They were built mainly to quiet down the Committee members' impatience and keep up their interest in the Mekong project, since "the desire for tangible results of planning is so great."[2]

Both criteria of national development and regional cooperation were debatable in the cases of Nam Pong and Nam Ngum. The two dams created enormous and unfamiliar

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1. Sewell & White, op. cit., p. 59.

2. Ibid.

social problems of resettlement which might have bred discontentment, unrest and violence, thereby posing a big challenge to the central authority. As for regional cooperation, it is technically true of Laos and Thailand in their exchange of power between the two dams. However, effective and true regional cooperation among the four riparian states could only be provided and nurtured by the construction of international mainstream projects, as the Member for Vietnam, Pham-Minh-Duong, made it clear at the Committee meeting of March 1960:

> "It is true that each multiple purpose tributary project paves the way for larger projects... But these minor projects do not fully reflect the international character of the project and do not create sufficient practical incentive for our four countries. Only a project on the main river can provide the people of the riparian countries with the energy required to go forward from merely technical cooperation to full economic cooperation."[1]

Furthermore, whether the projects are national or regional, the Mekong Committee members have not been consistent with their choice of criteria between economic efficiency and political purpose to "reduce international tensions," as Professor Sewell and White put it. For example, it was well acknowledged by many officials that the Nam Ngum dam in Laos was financed and built for

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1. The Mekong Committee, Report of the Ninth Session (Special), UN Doc. E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/Rev. 27, 21 March 1960, Annex 6, p. 3.

political reasons against economic viability of the project. From the point of view of the economically optimum the World Bank desk study, undertaken in October-December 1964 at the request of the Mekong Committee, "feels that it might be more desirable to continue for a few more years with thermal power, and then, after a half decade or so, again consider the question of construction of the Nam Ngum."[1] On the contrary, the My-Thuan bridge in Vietnam could not get financed and built because it was not "sound" economically. This has produced ill feeling among the Vietnamese who legitimately wondered why troubled Laos could have a big dam and Vietnam could not get a little bridge which was badly needed for the people's communications in the populous delta.

With regard to regional mainstream projects, the Pa Mong dam was also selected more for political reason than for economic viability. Pa Mong has the advantage of being located between Thailand and Laos, whereas the other mainstreams of Sambor, Tonle Sap and Stung Treng are situated solely and entirely in Cambodia (which under Sihanouk or Lon Nol was far from being "predictable"). But in the eyes of the Cambodians and Vietnamese, the Stung Treng dam is much sounder economically than the Pa Mong. It has the same power capacity as Pa Mong "but it is more efficient in flood

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1. The Mekong Committee, Annual Report 1969, p. 42.

Control and protects a cultivated area 37 times larger with a cost $200 million cheaper."[1]

This thorny issue of project selection and priority was related and compounded by the financing problem. The Prek Thnot project in Cambodia illustrated a case of crisis of cooperation caused essentially by financing difficulties and the attitude of the United States, but not by conflicts between the riparian members. On the contrary, the Committee members exhibited their solidarity and unity in this particular instance. Nevertheless, this did not prevent Cambodia from boycotting two Committee meetings, which threatened the life of the Committee itself. Although Laos, Thailand and Vietnam were not responsible for the financing difficulty their good relationship with Cambodia was impaired within the Mekong Committee, and political tension was heightened in the region, as Prince Sihanouk attacked American aid program in Southeast Asia:

> "Cambodia aversion for America stems from her action in furnishing the Bangkok and Saigon regimes... with an enormous material, financial and military potential, and has thus enabled them to threaten our territorial integrity, our regime and the peaceful conditions we at present enjoy."2

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1. Republic of Vietnam, Plan Co-ordination Meeting in Saigon on the Lower Mekong Amplified Basin Plan (draft), (ECAFE/MKG), August 1970, p. 13.

2. Norodom Sihanouk, "What Do Our Independence And Neutrality Really Denote," Kambuja, September 15, 1965.

Another cause of conflict stems from what Professor Gunther Luschen in his paper on Cooperation, Association, and Contest called "role-interdependence in regard to goals or rewards."[1] Mutual benefits in Lower Mekong regional cooperation became mostly national individual benefits which were, in addition, distributed very unevenly. Thailand got two completed dams and two others under construction. Laos had two dams in operation. Cambodia got the Prek Thnot, the construction of which was delayed by local conditions. Vietnam was still waiting for the My-Thuan funding solution.

In terms of physical size, political stability, and economic stage of growth, regional cooperation favored the most advanced country, which is Thailand. On the other hand, in terms of the importance of the Mekong river to each individual country regional cooperation has not fulfilled the needs of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam which mostly depend upon, and lie within, the Mekong river basin, but has far exceeded the expectations of Thailand, for which the river holds only a marginal boundary role.

Consequently, this "distribution crisis," or the failure of the Mekong Committee to spread its concrete and tangible benefits equitably, generated frustration, growing demands for reform, and even unilateral national action.

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1. Luschen, Gunther, "Cooperation, Association, and Contest," Conflict Resolution, Vol. XIV, No. 1, March 1970, p. 24.

One of the demands was to move the Mekong Secretariat to Vientiane, in Laos, next year, because it was believed that the country that housed the Mekong Secretariat got the greater attention and benefits. This was the advantage of Thailand which has hosted the Mekong Secretariat for nearly fifteen years.

More threatening to Mekong regional cooperation was an attempt at unilateral approach for the Mekong Delta development by Vietnam. In March 1969, the study on The Postwar Development of the Republic of Vietnam, undertaken jointly by the Postwar Planning Group of the Republic of Vietnam headed by Professor Vu Quoc Thuc and the Development and Resources Corporation (under a USAID contract) headed by Mr. David Lilienthal greatly emphasized and gave high priority to the Mekong Delta development. Among other things, they recommended the creation of a national "Mekong Delta Development Authority" in charge of "the investigation, planning, design, and implementation of projects and programs for the control and utilization of the region's water resources on the lines suggested in this Report."[1]

Clearly, the development of the Mekong Delta was viewed by the Vietnamese government as a "national interest" and a national project which could be undertaken unilaterally without waiting for the Mekong Committee decision on upstream works. The report stated that:

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1. Postwar Development of Vietnam, A Summary Report of the Joint Development Group, Saigon: The Vietnam Council on Foreign Relations, Reference 916, p. 65.

> "There is no need to delay water control in the Delta until upstream reservoirs can be constructed because all elements of water control, except dry-season flow augmentation for irrigation water supply, can be provided most economically by facilities in the Delta."[1]

There was no indication of Pa Mong's eventual role in providing upstream storage which would secure the availability of water supply in the dry season for the Delta development. There was no mention about possible connection, delineation, and articulation of functions between the Delta Development Authority and the Mekong Committee.

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1. The Postwar Development of the Republic of Vietnam: Policies and Programs, by the Joint Development Group, New York: Preager, 1971

Chapter V

The Effects of the Mekong Regional Cooperation

As a case study of regional cooperation, the Lower Mekong Project has been viewed by many as one of the most successful attempts to solve economic, social and political problems in mainland Southeast Asia.[1] It is time in this last chapter of Part II to assess the effects of the Mekong regional cooperation on the economic development and political security in this region, and its impact on riparian elite's perception.

I.- Problems of Economic Development and Political Security

A look at the concrete achievements of the Mekong Committee bears out the belief "that economic cooperation can transcend political animosity...in the operation of the Mekong Project."[2] Two tributary dams (Nam Pong and Nam Pung) are in operation in Northeast Thailand, a strategic region "where economic backwardness has sown the seeds of political discontent." The most outstanding example is the Nam Ngum which has relatively been "an island of peace" in Laos. The project was approved and respected by the

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1. White, G.F., "Vietnam: The Fourth Course," Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, Dec.1964, pp. 6-10; Sewell, W.R.D., "The Mekong Scheme: Guideline for a Solution to Strife in Southeast Asia," Asian Survey, June 1968, pp. 448-455.

2. Towards Integration in Asia, ECAFE, E/AC.54/L.35, March 1969, p. 44.

Pathet Lao. On March 1, 1964, the Prime Minister of Laos sent a cable to Secretary-General U Thant, in which he guaranteed the maintenance of law and order in the project area, after an agreement had been reached among the three political factions on the desirability of the project. In fact, the damsite and the Japanese community working and living in this jungle area were never attacked. Although the project was located in one of the critical areas of the war, work was completed ahead of schedule. In a region torn by civil wars and political disturbances the construction of the Nam Ngum dam was quite a tour de force.

More impressive was the record of the Mekong Committee meetings. In fourteen years (1957-1971) the four riparian members met together over fifty times (an average of three to four meetings a year) despite the fact that two of them did not have any relationship whatsoever for nine years (1961-1970), or two-thirds of the Mekong Committee lifetime. Cambodia broke off its relations with Thailand in October 19611961, with the Republic of Vietnam in August 1963, and resumed them both only after March 1970.

The extraordinary fact is that the construction stage of tributary dams coincided mostly with the period of severed relations between Cambodia and Thailand and South Vietnam. Were the decisions on tributary dams made not in spite of, but because of, the rupture of diplomatic relations in order to keep the organization alive? In any case, the Mekong Committee achievements are evidence of "what can be accomplished,

despite deep antagonism, when specific problems are approached by expert groups," as one observer put it.

However, the crux of the matter is not the technical achievements in themselves but whether these achievements did extend Mekong regional cooperation from the data collection and planning stage into the economic, social and political level of development. For this was the raison d'etre of the establishment of the Mekong Committee in 1957. The purpose and expectation were that decisions and achievements of the Committee would be stepping stones cementing its four members together and at the same time promoting an increasingly extensive cooperation - in form and degree - among them. Concrete and technical achievements are not the goal, but only the means to nurture a more comprehensive regional cooperation, and regional cooperation is regarded as the best means to bring about economic growth and political security in the region. The ultimate goal is development in all its aspects.

At this writing there is no indication of such an encompassing regional cooperation among the four Mekong countries. The lower Mekong scheme was planned in three successives and interrelated stages in order to strengthen the scope and degree of regional cooperation among the four: 1/ technical investigation and planning, 2/ tributary projects and 3/ mainstream projects. The rationale was that technical cooperation obtained in the first stage would extend into a stronger regional cooperation in the second

stage of tributary development, the experience and benefits of which would lead to a broader regional cooperation in the third stage of mainstream development. If it is true that during the first stage the four Mekong members did cooperate harmoniously and effectively in the collection of information, participation in planning and adoption of a few general principles of development, their cooperation has not spilled over into the development of tributary projects.

The second stage of the Lower Mekong scheme has been characterized by both the production of dams and a standstill or even a setback of Mekong regional cooperation in the sense that each member returned to its own house and occupations. The priority of the Mekong Committee's members has shifted from regional matters to national interests and benefits. Each member country was preoccupied with its own national dam or its own national delta development. There was no common involvement and participation of the four Mekong members in economic problems and social hurdles engendered by the construction of the first dams. Consequently there were no commonly-shared regional experience and benefits which could help increase the scope and degree of regional cooperation among the four riparians. Partly because of their limited regional cooperation the four Mekong members were not yet ready to embark upon international mainstream projects. The spill-over did not take place, as will be examined below.

For one thing, the cooperation among Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam which was established relatively easily at the data collection and planning stage failed to spill over into the development stage mainly because "tributary development rests, in each case, with the final decision of the territorial state concerned."[1] The planning and selection of tributary dams was made by the Mekong Committee but the decision to build and develop the Nam Pong and Nam Pung dams in Thailand, for example, depended entirely upon the Thai government which could have decided otherwise, if it chose to. Consequently, during the construction, development and management of the dams the Thai government, not the Mekong Committee, should take all the responsibilities for personnel accidents, material damages, security in the project area, economic viability of the project, and other social problems of resettlements. Recently when the Prek Thnot damsite in Cambodia was disturbed by local conditions, it was the main and sole concern of the Cambodian government, not the Mekong Committee. It was up to the Cambodian government to secure the project area. The Mekong Committee was not practically involved at all.

Likewise, resettlement of people was handled independently and individually in each case (Thailand, Laos and

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1. Wolwend, Bernard, op. cit., p. 66.

Cambodia) by respective governments, and not by a coordinating team of riparian administrators of the four countries permanently attached to the Mekong Secretariat. Theories of resettlement and experience learned by an individual country were shared in seminars organized not by the Mekong Committee but by the Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group[1] based in New York city. There has been little common "riparian" sense of real and effective commitment and participation in the same common problem. The Vietnamese would say about resettlement in the three neighboring countries "It is their own business" until a dam will be built in Vietnam, and then Cambodian, Laotian and Thai counterparts would say "Now it is Vietnamese business." This kind of attitude denotes at best indifference among riparian countries and at worst competition among them about who does best in the resettlement problem. The reality will be probably somewhere between these two extremes: a theoretical and rhetorical concern for one's neighbor's situation on one hand, and a non-involvement in practice and action with regard to one's neighbor's problems, on the other.

Thus technical cooperation at the investigation stage was not extended into economic and social cooperation, not

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1. The Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group (SEADAG) was created in 1965 in New York city under the chairmanship of the late Kenneth T. Young.

to speak of political cooperation, at the development stage. In May 1965, for example, an amendment of the Statute was suggested by the Mekong Committee to reflect the broadening of the Committee's activities better. In its instruction to the Mekong Secretariat in charge of preparing the amended draft the Committee made it explicitly clear that the amended Statute should

> "...retain the essential features of the present Committee practice, in particular: concern with technical but not with political matters; no interest in assistance to which political conditions are attached; decision-making processes whereby no member of the Committee is ever asked to undertake or participate in any project not desired and approved by it..."[1]

After fourteen years of existence Mekong regional cooperation among the four member countries has remained mostly technical. It did not spill over into decision-making with respect to economic costs and benefits of projects, social problems of resettlement and political disturbances in the region. Since March 1970 the bilateral Cambodian-Vietnamese cooperation in the politico-military field, if it could improve the work of the Committee in the future, had nothing to do with the Mekong Project. Let us also recall that during the November 1960 political crisis in Laos a bilateral Thai-Lao agreement was worked out to secure militarily the Pa Mong damsite which, it should be

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1. UN Communique, meeting of the Committee, Bangkok, May 10-11, 1965, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.149, Rev. 1.

noted, is not only a Thai-Lao undertaking but an international project that must involve all four members of the Mekong Committee. The point to be stressed is that wherever and whenever a politico-military cooperation is found in the Lower Mekong region it is a bilateral and not a quadrangular arrangement within the Mekong Committee framework.

Reasons for the Spill-Over Failure

The reasons for the Mekong Committee's unwillingness or inability to go beyond a mere technical cooperation could be explained in terms of the Haas-Schmitter background variables for regional cooperation and integration on one hand, and the role of experts on the other.

If we consider the four background variables set up by Haas and Schmitter to measure the probabilities of integration of a regional organization, we will see that the possibilities of regional cooperation and integration in the Mekong region are very low. The four background variables are physical, economic, cultural and political. As already known, there exists a great differentiation in size between the Mekong countries. This differing size of the member units is more conducive to competition than cooperation in regional development. Also competitive are the four different money currencies and the economies of the four countries which produce basically the same products, and consequently trade with each other very little. Culturally, the region is a mosaic of languages, religions, traditions and customs complicated by the problems of ethnic

minorities and a sizable Chinese community in all four societies. Politically, mutual mistrust and rivalries among the four countries have led them either into open hostilities and wars or into bilateral alliances to neutralize or counter-move the other two, like in any four-sided struggle for power.

Thus, the four background variables of the Mekong countries indicate a lack of homogeneity and unity, a greater trend toward competition than cooperation, and a tradition of more hostilities than alliances. The Mekong river has been the only unifying physical factor. Accordingly, the chances for the success of regional cooperation and integration in the Lower Mekong region rank very low in all four variables taken together and in each one individually.

Furthermore, construction of tributary dams in Thailand and Laos did not have a "spill-over" effect on Mekong regional cooperation but some "spill-back" effect, instead. One sign of this "spill-back" effect was the Vietnamese unilateral decision to develop the Mekong Delta without the Mekong Committee's participation and help. Also, as already examined in the preceding chapter, the "backwash" effects of regional economic development could in the long run endanger the region-building process in the Lower Mekong Valley.

The role of experts in furthering regional cooperation in the Mekong region is much more difficult to assess. Without them the Mekong Committee could not have possibly

started. And in such a complicated project undertaken in such a critical environment a good start is very useful to create an atmosphere of trust, friendship and hope. The member for Thailand told the writer that his participation in the Mekong Committee in 1957 was a personal commitment because during those years the government of Thailand had a difficult time with the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments.

But it is also true that because of experts' role regional cooperation has not been able to move from the technical field into the political area. The experts lack both courage and competence to deal with political matters. While every member of the Mekong Committee recognizes that "of course, politics are involved" in this highly technical scheme he is also quick to add "but we eschew them," "we blind them" or simply "we don't talk about them." The result is that no one dares raise the political ambiguities which loom in the region as a whole and between Thailand and Laos, between Vietnam and Cambodia. For example, what would happen to the Mekong Committee if the former French Indochina fell under Communist rule? What would happen to the Pa Mong mainstream project between Laos and Thailand if the Communists took over Laos? Big Thailand could not passively contemplate a communist take-over in little Laos if she considered electric power generated by Pa Mong as a matter of vital interest for Thai security and development. The tendency would be great to intervene in the internal

politics of Laos. This eventuality would make Laotian leaders - be they communist, neutralist, or rightist - always suspicious of Thai intentions. The same dilemma confronts Cambodia and Vietnam with regard to an integrated development of the Mekong Delta. Both countries and people have lived through the presence of foreign troops on their soils and would certainly not repeat this painful experience in the future, if they could avoid it.

The experts lack the courage to face these sensitive political problems. The tendency is to adopt a hands-off policy when political difficulties occur and even threaten the life and work of the Mekong Committee, and to put all the responsibility and blame on the politicians. Sometimes techno-bureaucratic expertise serves as a good refuge and excuse for those who do not want to take responsibility for the political destiny of their country.

This attitude is mostly related to and determined by the experts' lack of competence and power to cope with political issues. In developing societies where any development issue, and any economic issue for that matter, is politicized and differentiation of roles is not always clear, "the ministers hold the key to the transformation and may refuse it unless the goals are defined and the results already achieved are satisfactory,"[1] as Professor Stanley

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1. Hoffman, Stanley, "Obstinate or Obsolete? The Fate of the Nation-State and The Case of Western Europe," in Nye, J.S., ed., International Regionalism, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968, p. 202.

Hoffman rightly pointed out. Particularly in developing countries technocrats propose but politicians dispose. Policy-decisions are made by politicians "whose mode of operation is empirical muddling through of the kind that puts immediate advantages above long term pursuits."[1]

Therefore, development policy defined by techno-bureaucrats are hardly conceivable or acceptable to political decision-makers, especially in countries at war like Vietnam. In 1966, the representative of this country indicated that "In a country like Vietnam, long term projects and plans, extending over 3, 5 or 10 years, are difficult to carry out in the context of political instability. We are living in a world of doubt and therefore only a general ad-hoc program for 1966 is possible, no further."[2] In 1970, Vietnamese officials objected to the Amplified Basin Plan which planned for "three decades" because it was "misinformed, misleading and unrealistic," about Vietnam development policy.

The functionalist idea that experts'opinions could stiffle political controversy in putting greater emphasis upon welfare than power was not realistic in view of the

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1. Hoffman, Stanley, "Obstinate or Obsolete? The Fate of the Nation-State and the Case of Western Europe," in Nye, J.S., ed., International Regionalism, Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1968, p. 205

2. First Regional Seminar on Economic & Social Problems, Bangkok, 4-11, July 1965, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.176, p. 113.

particular situation of new emerging nations. In addition, the functionalist failed to distinguish clearly between various kinds of welfare-function. There are at least three different kinds and the role of the expert is different with each of them: some are more suitable than others for the attention of experts working in international institutions and for the creation of international consensus.

The first kind of function is purely technical and scientific in nature and is according to the experts themselves "non-controversial." The construction of dams and bridges are examples of this kind of function. The second kind may involve disagreement among experts: they present problems for which there is at present no simple scientific or technical solution. This failure may allow political disagreement to prevent action. Examples of this function include the correct management of international mainstream projects, like the Pa Mong dam and the My Thuan bridge, and the control of fishing in international waters. But it is an important characteristic of these functions that political disagreement may be eventually resolved by an overwhelming agreement among experts or by the willingness of politicians, in the face of the seriousness of the problem or the gains to be obtained, to allow effective action. In this case the politicians allow the experts to experiment in the real world, and we have no reason to suppose that in these cases further research will not ultimately undermine the primacy of power of politics. When they focus upon these two

functional areas the functionalist theories seem to be viable.

The third kind of function presents greater problems because it involves political decisions. An example of this function would be the demand for an international treaty on the Mekong Valley Authority. The difficulty here is that agreement on such matters is essentially a reflection of a political consensus, and has little to do with the opinions of experts. There is little prospect of experts being able to sustain the political force with their own scientific and technical dynamic: the function is in the first place prompted by a nationally defined political value. Any extension of Functionalism to include such political acts is bound to be self-defeating.

The approach of the older functionalists may in the long run weaken the capacity of statesmen to pursue national, political objectives. But it is inappropriate in the context of their theory to harness the pursuit of national political objectives themselves to the task of creating an international consensus on welfare needs. A failure to make this point sufficiently clear, and a lack of clarity about the various types of functions opened the way to the criticism that the functionalist distinctions between politics and welfare are unreal, and it weakened their argument about the possible role of the experts in resolving conflict and in dampering the ardours of national actors.

This analysis points up the usefulnees of the expert

in a particular situation and not on the expert as bearer of a general panacea. The role of experts in the Lower Mekong Development has been primordial and effective during the period of technical investigation and planning, and the construction of tributary dams. However, the experts'role will become less and less important and influential when we reach the stage of development and management of international mainstream projects, which requires political decisions and actions. The member for Thailand admitted to the writer that the schedule of mainstream projects "was not fulfilled,"[1] and strongly emphasized that "Peace" in the region was "the precondition for mainstream projects."

On the other hand, Vietnamese officials recognized that the war was partly responsible for the Vietnamese non-beneficial role in the Mekong Committee and the delay of the My-Thuan bridge which, it should be noted, will be on the international mainstream river. Mr. Bui-Huu-Tuan, Director of Cabinet of the Public Works Ministry, even argued that political cooperation among the riparians would be necessary to carry out the mainstream projects of the Lower Mekong Scheme. He cited as examples the delta development and the My-Thuan bridge which appeared to have a better prospect

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1. According to Dr. Binson, the planned schedule of the Mekong Project was as follows:
   1957-62: data collection
   1963-67: tributary projects
   1968-72: mainstream projects

since Cambodia and the Republic of Vietnam resumed their diplomatic relations in 1970.

In conclusion, we could fairly say that the functional approach to regional economic andpolitical cooperation did not have great success in the Lower Mekong Valley. The Mekong Committee, after fourteen years of activities, has not produced political cooperation, or stability. The political situation in 1972 compared to that of 1957 in this part of Southeast Asia is more uncertain and unpredictable than ever. Each one of the four countries pursues its own national development, grapples with its own internal crises, and tries to accommodate itself to world politics the best it can according to its own national interests.

II.- Impact on Riparian Elite's Perception

After gaining their political independence, most developing countries devoted their effort and energy to modernization. They could embark on modernization either individually or jointly with neighboring states in the forms of free trade associations or common markets. The four riparian states of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Republic of Vietnam came to develop the Mekong river as their joint venture toward modernization.

It is true that the Mekong Project was initiated by UN ECAFE. However, after the project started and progressed, a sense of interdependence and solidarity has evolved among riparian officials. But this does not in turn involve a total commitment of riparian states to the Mekong Project.

The remaining pages will explore this problem of riparian elite's perception of Mekong regional cooperation.

The Mekong river has been perceived by riparian officials as the only common link binding the four nations together. As a Vietnamese official put it, "we are on the same boat." Mr. Phlek Chatt, the Cambodian member, made a pertinent remark when he observed that "a river cannot be divided up into pieces like land or rice fields." Exploitation of the upstream is bound to affect the downstream and vice-versa. Therefore, interdependence of riparian states has been the key feature of the development of the Mekong.

However, interdependence of riparian states, if essential, was not enough. Their solidarity was equally stressed. In October 1959, when the Mekong Committee held its sixth session in Phnom Penh, Prince Sihanouk welcomed the Committee with these words:

> "And as for our hope, it is founded in the deep conviction that through the spirit of solidarity and understanding which inspires your work, you will definitely open the way to that international cooperation which, sooner or later, must inevitably be established between countries whose destinies and interests are, come what may, inextricably linked."[1]

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1. Summary of Conclusions Reached at the Sixth Session of the Committee, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 15-19 October 1959, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/R. 20, dated 17 November 1959.

Mr. Oukeo Souvannavong, the Laotian representative, also emphasized that:

> "Success in our task is...dependent on... agreement and solidarity among the members of this Committee."[1]

At the next session held in Bangkok, Dr. Boonrod Binson, the Thai Chairman of the Committee for the year 1960, concluded his report as follows:

> "...without the complete accord among our Committee members in all the issues, we shall never have accomplished and shall never be where we proudly stand at present."[2]

When the Committee moved to Saigon, Vietnamese Vice President Nguyen-Ngoc-Tho opened its twelfth session in these terms:

> "In a region which is troubled and torn between rival ideologies and where freedom-loving people are fighting with all their right against all attempts to enslave them it is most comforting to observe the perfect agreement which prevails among the four riparian countries, which stand united in their common endeavour to harness hitherto untamed natural forces..."[3]

Solidarity among the Mekong riparian states was especially required with regard to the problem of financial resources. The UN Report of a Panel of Experts on

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1. Summary of Conclusions Reached at the Sixth Session of the Committee, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 15-19 October 1959, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/R. 20, dated 17 November 1959.

2. "Report of the Seventh Session of the Committee," Bangkok, Thailand, 6-11 January 1960, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/R. 23, dated 3 Feb. 1960.

3. "Report of the Twelfth Session of the Committee," Saigon, Vietnam, 22-27 February 1961, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/R. 36, 28 March 1961.

Integrated River Basin Development indicated that there was no country "likely to be able to embark on a programme of integrated development without extraneous help in one form or another."[1] The Mekong river development is no exception. To raise funds the Mekong Committee must show not only the viability and rentability of the project but also its solidarity behind it. Bankers and donor countries, when dealing with a group of states or institution, understandably want to make sure that the group is cohesive, united and effective so that their money will not be wasted and can be repaid properly.

Indeed, solidarity among the Committee members in raising funds has been emphatically exhibited many times in the past. The two famous "causes celebres" of the history of the Committee have been the Prek Thnot project in Cambodia and the My-Thuan bridge in Vietnam. These two projects were singled out and given high priorities at the thirtieth session of the Mekong Committee which designated 1966 the "Cambodia Year." Ready for construction the $27 million Prek Thnot dam and the $22 million My-Thuan bridge encountered financing difficulties mainly because of the attitude of the United States, the principal donor country of the Lower Mekong Development. In June 1966, the United States pledged $7 million to the Prek Thnot.

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1. E/3066/Rev.1, 1970, p. 35.

But, in the fall of that year the United States backed out on its promise, and in February 1967 it formally announced its decision not to contribute to the Cambodian dam, because of the September 1966 Findley Amendment to the Aid Appropriation measure which forbade aid to any nation helping North Vietnam. The My-Thuan bridge also met US reluctance to help a funding solution on the grounds of bad security in the region.

In spite of the fact that diplomatic relations were on the decline and mutual violent charges of boundary violations between Cambodia and Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam during this tense period 1966-1969, the four members of the Mekong Committee constantly showed an admirable solidarity in their plea for financial assistance for the two projects. In April 1968, Dr. Binson, on behalf of the Mekong Committee, made it clear in his statement to the twenty-fourth Session of ECAFE held in Canberra, Australia, that "the project which continues to concern us most immediately is the Prek Thnot tributary project in Cambodia." He then called on friendly nations to make their pledges and hoped that "the implementation of the Prek Thnot project will be well in hand before the end of the year."[1] Effectively, on September 9 and 10 a Conference on the

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1. "Report of the Thirty-fifth Session of the Committee," Canberra, Australia, 17-30 April 1968, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.231, dated 16 May 1968.

Financing of the Prek Thnot was opened in Phnom Penh. The participants included Australia, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, ECAFE, the Mekong Committee and the UNDP. On November 13, eleven countries signed an agreement to set in motion a $27 million project. In October 1969, construction of the Prek Thnot began.

The My-Thuan bridge was less fortunate. The decision to build the bridge was made in 1962. In September 1964, the Mekong Committee laid down the two following principles:

a/ no bridge across the Mekong shall be allowed to impede international maritime traffic, and

b/ the Committee will consider ways and means of meeting additional costs incurred as a result of providing the lateral and vertical clearance required for free international navigation.

In February 1965, a feasibility report was prepared by Japanese Nippon Koei which was estimated at the cost of $16 million. There followed a long dialogue with the principal donor, the United States, which argued that the cost was not justified and suggested a movable bridge instead. In February 1967, the United States offered to make a comprehensive study of the project. King & Gavaris - PERIL performed the task and submitted its report to the Committee in August 1968. It considered a movable bridge estimated at $20.6 million, and argued that an improved

ferry service could meet present Vietnamese needs as well.

Rejecting the US view the Mekong Committee adopted a resolution on the construction of the bridge at its thirty-seventh session, in September 1968. The resolution reaffirmed "the urgent need and importance to the Republic of Vietnam...of constructing such a bridge across the Mekong River at My-Thuan in Vietnam," recorded "the unanimous decision reached between the four riparian countries...to assist financially in the urgent implementation of the My-Thuan bridge project," and invited the UN and ECAFE member-states to contribute "generously to the cost of the My-Thuan bridge in Vietnam."[1] In April 1969, at the twenty-fifth session of ECAFE in Singapore, Laos pledged one million kips (Laotian currency) to the My-Thuan bridge. Thailand and Cambodia restated the intention of their Governments to contribute, as a token of the solidarity of the Mekong Committee. At the fourty-second session of the Committee, in September 1969, the United States mildly lessened its position and informed the Committee that, although its review of the situation compelled the conclusion that construction was not desirable at the time, it would give sympathetic consideration for funding up to 25% of the cost of the bridge,

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1. "Report of the Thirty-Seventh Session of the Committee," Bangkok, Thailand, 11-13 September 1968, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.242/Rev. 1, dated 28 January 1969.

when security and economic conditions warranted.[1] The My-Thuan bridge was still in need of money although the Republic of Vietnam undertook to contribute up to 50 per cent of the total cost.

In these two cases the Committee members closed their ranks in a common front against the United States, and in the Prek Thnot example they even succeeded, with the helpful assistance of UN Secretary-General U Thant, to overcome the US withdrawal.

Recently, we had the opportunity to watch the Mekong Committee at work in a plenary session of January 1971. The behavior pattern of the Committee was serious, hard-working, and businesslike. However, the most impressive quality was the Committee's consensus and solidarity whenever it was a question of asking for financial assistance to donor countries and Bankers. The four riparian states unanimously raised their hope that the ADB and the World Bank will be more actively involved in the Project.

Solidarity among the Committee members has also been displayed in coping with threats to the security and stability of the region. Threats to members of a group tend to increase their solidarity, as explained by the threat-cohesion hypothesis.[2] Briefly stated, the hypothesis

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1. The Mekong Committee, Annual Report 1969, p. 4.

2. Zeff, L.H. & Iverson, M.A., "Opinion Conformity of Groups under Status Threat," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol. 3, 1966, pp. 383-389

suggests that group members faced with a common threat will up to a point turn increasingly inward, becoming more cohesive as the threat increases. Cohesiveness is broadly defined as the "total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group."[1] Muzafer Sherif in his study of intergroup conflict and cooperation also concludes that "experience of a common predicament is a tie that binds conflicting groups more firmly than other commonality. Common opposition is also a unifying force."[2]

Sherif's observations could be applied to the four antagonistic riparian states of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam which have little in common and have been bound together mainly by a series of threats. First of all, Chinese communist expansion threat played a role in holding the Committee members together in the mid-fifties. Then, the perspective of US disengagement from the region in the seventies might be another threat which could consolidate the Mekong Committee more strongly. Finally, subversive actions and guerilla warfare could also unite the member states mor firmly. Indeed, on the eve of the fiftieth Plenary Session of the Mekong Committee in Vientiane, in January 1971, when the Phnom Penh airport

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1. Festinger, L., Schachter, S., & Back, K., Social Pressures in Informal Groups, New York: Harper, 1950, p. 164.

2. Sherif, Muzafer, In Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict & Cooperation, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966, p. viii.

was bombed there was deep concern about the possibility of the Cambodian delegation attending the meeting. There were talks about sending a special plane to the Cambodian capital and making special arrangements to allow the Cambodian delegates to come to Vientiane. It was not only concern but also a sense of solidarity among member states in time of crisis, which was expressed by Dr. Binson in a very simple way:

> "...tonight while on the train coming here I was wondering whether my friend from Cambodia was coming at all because I heard that maybe there is something during the Tet there, that may be some trouble and I was very happy to see Mr. Phlek Chhat this morning."[1]

Taming the Mekong river, economic development, social modernization, financing problem and threats are elements that contribute to the process of the Mekong regional identity. However, if geographical boundaries do not change and social factors rarely do, political and ideological constituents are fluid. Consequently, the identity of a regional set-up is both tenueous and dynamic, as proved by the Cambodian events and crises.

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1. Statement by H.E. Dr. Boonrod Binson at the Fiftieth Session of the Committee, Vientiane, 27 January, 1 February, 1971.
Another illustration was given by Dr. Hart Schaaf in The Lower Mekong. It was in 1960 when the Committee was scheduled to meet in Vientiane on November 23. At that particular time the Laotian kingdom encountered political difficulties and even armed conflicts. Solidarity among the members prevailed and the Committee met in Vientiane as planned. p. 127.

To sustain regional identity some habits and practices have been instituted, such as ceremonial openings by distinguished public figures - kings, chiefs of state or prime ministers - which constitute an essential ritual of the Committee meetings. It has been compelled by necessity to be deeply involved with emotional and promotional activities that help maintain and increase regional identity.

Perhaps the best promoters of the Mekong regional identity are the individuals themselves. In 1957, all the four members of the Mekong Committee came from the class of technocrats and had assumed responsible technical posts in their respective countries. Mr. Sonn Voeunsai was Inspector of General Planning in Cambodia, Mr. Oukeo Souvannavong held the same position in Laos, Dr. Boonrod Binson was Secretary-General of the National Energy Authority in Thailand, and Mr. Pham-Minh-Duong was Secretary-General of the Ministry of Public Works in Vietnam. Well-trained, efficiency-orientated and highly-motivated engineers, they aimed at concrete and great achievements, such as big dams and projects. Idealistic and optimistic some called themselves "dreamers."

In 1971, the Mekong Committee looked to us like a club of engineers, experts and old friends who have been working together since 1957. Indeed, the permanence of members was striking. Dr. Binson has been the member for Thailand without interruption since the establishment of the Committee. Mr. Phlek Chatt, replacing Mr. Sonn Voeunsai, has been

representing for more than a decade Cambodia (the Khmer Kingdom as well as the Khmer Republic since March 1970). Mr. Pham-Huu-Vinh has the been the third member for Vietnam (after Mr. Trinh-Ngoc-Sanh) since 1966. The newest member was Mr. Inpeng Suryadhay who took over from Mr. Oukeo Souvannavong who became the first riparian Director of Agriculture Division of the Mekong Secretariat in January 1970.

Partly because of this quasi-permanent character of membership, personal relationship has played a constructive role in the work and growth of the Mekong Committee. For example, in December 1958 when Cambodia broke off its diplomatic relations with Thailand, special arrangements were made to allow the Cambodian delegation to come to Bangkok where the Mekong Committee meeting had been scheduled to be held at that critical period. On his arrival at Don Muang Airport, in Bangkok, the member for Cambodia was greeted by Dr. Binson. "The first words of Mr. Sonn Voeunsai," as related by Dr. Hart Schaaf, "were that his government had permitted him to come to Bangkok because of <u>his personal confidence in Dr. Binson</u>, in the Mekong Committee, and in the United Nations."[1]

Personal ties and common experiences engendered what the riparian member states called the "Mekong Spirit." This word was used by ECAFE Executive-Secretary U Nyun the first

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1. Schaaf, C. Hart, & Fifield, Russell, op. cit., p. 126.

time in the early sixties, and has been subject to several interpretations. According to Dr. Hart Schaaf, the Mekong Spirit described "this new atmosphere of hope and common purpose" of the Committee in its first years. It has been referred to as "a particular spirit of cooperation" by many others.

In January 1971, I asked the four riparian members of the Mekong Committee to define the "Mekong Spirit." All four agreed that the Mekong Spirit is first of all a "spirit of cooperation on a personal and individual basis regardless of politics, race or religion." The common emphasis was on a "cooperation among friends on an individual and human basis in spite of the superior political option." For nearly fifteen years the Mekong regional identity and Mekong Spirit have provided the riparian officials of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam with a basis and stimulus for cooperation.

But the real and vital issue, which must be considered by the four riparian states, will be: how much can you, and should you, cooperate? As yet, the nature of cooperation has been mostly technical and its scope very limited. For nearly fifteen years there has not been a single meeting of Ministers of Finance, Economy or Agriculture of the four governments. Trade exchanges among the four countries have been negligible. As an intergovernmental body, the Mekong Committee and its organizational structure involved only a handful of riparian people, mostly engineers, technicians

and secretaries.

Not only the degree of involvement was limited but also the degree of "compellingness" of regional cooperation among the Mekong countries has been minimal. "It is a cooperation based on physical element about which we cannot do anything; it is a physical necessity," Mr. Phlek Chatt told the writer in referring to the Mekong river which cannot be ignored or suppressed (that is the meaning of "about which we cannot do anything"), and which compels the riparians to get together. This view had been equally shared by other riparian members. At the first regional seminar on economic and social problems held in 1965, in Bangkok, Laotian and Vietnamese representatives agreed that "whether we like it or not the Mekong countries are bound together by certain physical factors." The Vietnamese went on to say that "as for cooperation, we are all together in the same boat by reason of certain physical constants in the region."[1]

Apart from common physical constants (the Mekong river, monsoon, flood control...) and outside factors (threats, financial and technical aid) what the Mekong Committee needed was perhaps to find a common formula for truly effective cooperation in meeting the problems of the region.

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1. First Seminar on Economic & Social Studies, Bangkok, 4-11 July, 1965, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.176, p. 112.

PART THREE

EXOGENOUS FORCES

Chapter VI

The US Role in The Mekong Regional Cooperation

American interest in the Mekong regional cooperation has reflected the general rationale of US interest in regional cooperation around the world. This rationale has rested on five fundamental considerations. The first "four major clusters of interests" were singled out by Joseph Nye in his study of "US Policy Toward Regional Organizations" in the world and pertained to 1/ hemispheric influence, 2/ containment, 3/ economic development and 4/ conflict prevention and management.[1]

From the post-war historical standpoint, Professor Walt Rostow, former assistant to President Johnson, offered a fifth interest. Support for regional cooperation was, according to him, "a way of permitting us to shift away from the disproportionate bilateral relations inherent in large power working with smaller powers," since the United States was "drawn into world responsibility after the second World War by the need to fill certain vacuums of power." Consequently, the United States "looked forward eagerly to the earliest time when other nations could stand on their own feet and deal with us as partners."[2]

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1. Nye, Joseph, "United States Policy Toward Regional Organizations," International Organization, XXIII, Summer 1969.

2. Rostow, Walt W., "The Great Transition: Tasks of the First and Second Postwar Generations," Lecture given at the University of Leeds, Leeds, England, 23 February, 1967.

In other words, US interests in regionalism have not been only to influence other regions of the world or to contain Communism but also to develop a substitute for a US preponderance and thereby lessen the US "burden of engagement":

> "We see in regionalism a way not of returning to isolation, but of leaving the nations of the various regions to do as much for themselves as they can - and more with the passage of time - while preserving the ties of interdependence where they are judged on both sides to be in the common interests."[1]

President Johnson succintly expressed this fifth interest - and probably the major one - while in office and in his memoirs. In 1966 he said:

> "Our purpose in promoting a world of regional partnerships is not without self-interest. For as they grow in strength... we can look forward to a decline in the burden that America has had to bear this generation."[2]

In 1971, he summed up his concern about, and emphasis on, regional cooperation with the observations that

> "...in the long run the American commitment in Asia, as in other parts of the world, could achieve its goals only if the nations of that region cooperated with one another, and only if they were ready to gradually take on a larger share of responsibility in managing their own affairs and in shaping their own futures."[3]

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1. Rostow, Walt W., "The Great Transition..." Lecture given at the University of Leeds, England, February 23, 1967.

2. Johnson, Lyndon B., Address at Lancaster, Ohio, September 1966.

3. Johnson, Lyndon B., The Vintage Point, New York: Popular Library, 1971, p. 356.

It should be noted, however, that this rationale of American regional policy operated within the context of the Cold War or bipolar confrontation between the East and West. From Truman to Johnson, each administration adopted different stresses and tactics to apply this same rationale of regionalism in Asia.

The Nixon Administration, while continuing the process to reduce American involvement and increase Asian self-reliance, engaged in a new concept of political regionalism stressing the accommodation of the four Great Powers, particularly China, within an Asian regional structure. The Nixon Doctrine, first enunciated in July 1969, focused on the goal of a "stable Asian structure," to be based on two pillars. One would be the collective interests of Asian states in regional groupings. The other would be great power diplomacy and readjustment.

At this writing it is rather difficult to make any assessment of the Nixon Doctrine on Asian regionalism for three reasons. First, the Nixon approach seemed thus far more interested in great power diplomacy than in Asian regional structure. Second, the Nixon Doctrine has not yet clearly elaborated on the shape or scope of such a structure, and how to build it. And third, the Nixon Doctrine raised a new and grave problem for the future rationale of regional cooperation in a multipolarity system. If the need for containment, the fear for communist expansion and domination were the clear motivation and coherent justification for US support of

regional cooperation in Asia, in the context of the East-West struggle prevailihg in the fifties and sixties, what will happen when the forum of accommodation supersedes the arena of confrontation in the multipolarity, in the seventies? The disappearance of a concrete and external enemy will probably decrease the need for military cooperation and may also lessen the support for economic cooperation.

For all these reasons, the following pages will examine the role of the United States in Mekong regional cooperation, specifically within the context of a bipolar system, from 1957 to 1970. In 1957, when the Mekong Committee was set up, not only the US filled the power vacuum left by the French in Indochina after 1954, but also in the context of the Cold War the US considered the Lower Mekong region its own area of exclusion, tried tc prevent non-interpenetration and cope with subversive infiltration. Effectively, the US was the only great power to play an active role in the Mekong Project.

This role necessitates a careful examination of the three distinct but interrelated variables of 1/ interests, 2/ attitudes and 3/ policies. While US interests in Mekong regional cooperation remained the same during 1957-70, US attitudes toward the process of Mekong regional cooperation have varied periodically. They even changed drastically in 1965, a turning point in Asian regionalism, under the leadership of President Johnson. Nevertheless, American bilateral policies toward the four separate sovereign states of

Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam have sometimes conflicted with regional cooperation programs undertaken by the Mekong Committee, although the US was a strong and constant supporter of the Mekong Project and Mekong Committee. Political considerations of short-run interests resulted in more rivalries than cooperation among Mekong riparian countries on several occasions.

Indeed, the political reasons for supporting Asian regionalism, although less tangible and self-evident than economic interests, were nevertheless extremely significant and decisive. Professor Gordon has perceived "both immediate and long term objectives" in US support of Asian regionalism. The short-term objective was "the belief that with the added development and stability that regional cooperation may bring, Asian states will grow ultimately less susceptible to subversion, and also better able to bear the costs of defending against it." The second "more fundamental US objective" was related to the "structure of international politics in East Asia." In his view, the formation of multi-bloc system in the 1970's should prevent "one-nation dominance in the region."[1]

Indeed, President Johnson stated this "overriding national interest" of the US in October 1966:

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1. Gordon, Bernard K., Toward Disengagement in Asia, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969, pp. 61-62.

> "No single nation can or should be permitted to dominate the Pacific region."[1]

This was, in fact, the first time that a president had declared that interest in such forthright, unambiguous terms.

US poltical considerations for engaging in Asian regional cooperation have become more apparent since 1965. Mr. Rostow specifically associated regional development in Asia to the war in Vietnam:

> "...the present phase of intense cooperative activity is closely linked on two historic actions: the decision taken by President Johnson early 1965 to do whatever was necessary to defeat aggression in Vietnam, and second, the articulation of his vision for Asia in the Baltimore speech of April 7, 1965."[2]

This implied that military action was not enough to solve the war but that the US was determined to maintain the Free World's position in that area. This US determination and leadership enhanced the political impulses for regional enterprise in Asia. As Mr. Rostow contended:

> "From South Korea to Australia, from Japan to Singapore, there are solid and particular national reasons why the nations of Asia and the Pacific should begin to group together in mutual support. These underlying considerations were strengthened by the American commitment of major forces in Vietnam in 1965 which has given to the region confidence that it has a future to design."[3]

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1. Johnson, L.B., Address at the East-West Center, Honolulu, October 17, 1966, Department State Bulletin, November 28, 1966, pp. 812-816.

2. Rostow, W.W., Department State Bulletin, December 19, 1966, p. 911

3. Rostow, W.W., Lecture at the University of Leeds, England, February 23, 1967.

In sum, the US has pursued five main political interests in Asian regional cooperation during the fifties and sixties: 1/ Containment of China, 2/ US influence in the region, 3/ collective security and political stability of the region 4/ an Asian power base as a substitute for US preponderance and 5/ conflict prevention and management. American attitudes and policies in the Mekong case confirm that the United States undertook its support largely for the first three interests. Whether the last two interests can materialize depends upon future developments and remains to be seen.

In any case, the underlying political assumption of US support for Mekong regional development and cooperation was that it could facilitate the political settlement and stability of the region with the participation of North Vietnam. Collective regional security under the umbrella of US power and influence would in turn become an effective shield to "contain" Communist China.

Accordingly, the United States has pursued both economic and political policies to meet these interests. However, the emphasis was more on economic than on political aspects of regional development, and more on containment than on influence for two reasons: first, the Mekong Project is a multilateral project under the auspices of the UNECAFE, and not under the direct control of the US, and secondly the Lower Mekong region is strategically situated just below Communist China, and not in proximity of the US

territory.[1] The whole rationale of American support for regional cooperation, in addition to the imagistic appeal of regionalism and rivers to the American mind, started and sustained an abiding interest in the Mekong Project, despite ups and downs of policy implementation.

The United States has maintained a continuous, active interest in Mekong regional cooperation since 1955. Following the Geneva Conference, the end of French responsibilities in Indochina, and the assumption of full independence by the riparian states of Cambodia, Laos and the Republic of Vietnam in 1954, the United States government immediately began its identification and association with the development of the Lower Mekong Basin in 1955. The initial American purposes in encouraging "regional associations," as it was then called in Washington, were to strengthen economic development in each country, lessen conflict among them and promote the long range cohesion and stability of the Mekong region. In August 1956, a year before the Mekong Committee was formally established, Mr. Kenneth Young, then Director of Southeast Asian Affairs at the Department of State, sponsored this policy:

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1. This makes the difference between US support of Asian regionalism and Latin American regionalism. In Asia US policy of regional cooperation purports to prevent one-nation dominance in the region. In Latin America it purports to preserve US influence in the area.

> "The countries of Southeast Asia may eventually find that some form of mutual association organized on a regional basis might be useful in various endeavors...There has been initiated a modest form of regional economic collaboration in the Mekong Valley with Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Without close mutual support the small Asian countries will be more vulnerable to predatory alien influences."[1]

The myth of great rivers and the image of another mighty TVA captured the American imagination from the tentative probings of the first officials to the passionate sponsorship of President Johnson.[2]

In 1955, the United States took the initiative of consulting with Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam about ways to expand such association. They in turn asked the International Cooperation Administration of the US government to help arrange for a survey of the possibilities and requirements of developing the Lower Mekong Basin.[3] After consultation, the four riparian governments and the United States signed an agreement for the US Bureau of Reclamation to make that survey, as noted in Chapter III. Its historic report of early 1956 helped launch the development thrust of the Mekong Project and the practical participation of the United States.

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1. Young, Kenneth T., Address at the University of Southern California, School of International Relations, Summer Forum, Los Angeles, "The Challenge of Asia to United States Policy," August 13, 1956.

2. Interview with Mr. Kenneth Young in June 1970, in New York.

1. Schaaf & Fifield, op. cit., p. 84.

The United States has contributed financially to the Mekong Project since its beginning. In 1958, the United States started with a pledge of $2 million. Six years later the American support had increased to $25,915,835 or about a quarter of a total of $105,664,470 contributed or pledged by riparians, donor countries and international agencies. In another five years the American contribution amounted to $36,559,342 by December 1970, or only 17% of the total of about $212,000,000. The United States remained, however, the largest single donor country.

Because the Lower Mekong Scheme is a UN project the priority has been placed on technical, economic and social development. Most of US aid was invested in research studies, technical investigations and planning ($19,914,342) and construction of dams ($16,645,000) in order to control floods in this region plagued by monsoons, produce more irrigation for rice fields and generate more power for economic and social life. Among pre-investment works undertaken by the US were the feasibility report of the Pa Mong mainstream project, which cost $9.7 million, the Nam Pong fisheries survey in Thailand and the My-Thuan bridge in Vietnam. The US also contributed $16 million for the construction of the Nam Ngum tributary dam in Laos and pledged assistance to its fishery development program.

This economic development of the Mekong basin was dramatically underscored by President Johnson's Johns Hopkins Speech, on April 7, 1965, in which he offered $1 billion to

help finance a Southeast Asian development program in a massive effort "to improve the life of man in the conflict-torn-corner of our world," and stressed the development of the Mekong river which "can provide food and water and power on a scale to dwarf even our own TVA."[1]

In the United States, the presidential proposal was hailed as the Marshall Plan, or more likely, the TVA for Southeast Asia development. Vice-President Johnson was reported saying to Mr. U Nyun, the Executive-Secretary of ECAFE, after he was briefed on the Mekong Project, in Bangkok, in May 1961:

> "You know, Mr. Executive-Secretary, I am a river man. All my life I have been interested in rivers and their development."[2]

Effectively, as a New Deal Congressman, Mr. Johnson was interested in building dams for his congressional district on the Colorado river. He was instrumental in bringing about the creation of the Lower River Authority in Central Texas.[3]

Abroad, President Johnson's offer seemed to have activated the spirit and will of the Southeast Asian leaders for steady economic development, as well. Particularly among the Mekong riparian officials "the proposal immediately gave

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1. Johnson, Lyndon B., "American Policy in Vietnam," in The Vietnam Reader, edited by Raskin and Fall, New York: A Vintage Book, 1967, pp. 347-348.

2. Foreign Service Journal, April 1966, p. 27.

3. Ibid.

rise to a flurry of interest."[1] The Mekong Committee convened an extraordinary meeting in Bangkok, on May 10-11, 1965. Although Prince Sihanouk broke off diplomatic relations with the US on May 3, the Cambodian Director of External Finance came to Bangkok to attend the meeting for the first time. In August, Laos and Thailand signed an agreement for exchange of power between the Thai Nam Pong and the Lao Nam Ngum. The arrangement which "is unique in the history of international power agreements"[2] was also co-signed by Cambodia and the Republic of Vietnam. By the end of 1965, eight countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Thailand) followed the US initiative and pledged their financial assistance to the construction of the Nam Ngum dam. The US pledged $13 million, which was half of the total cost estimated at $26 million at that time. By December 31, 1965, the operational resources of the Mekong Committee totalled $105,064,144 compared to $72,400,000 in January 1965, before the Johns Hopkins Speech was made. This constituted an increase of about $33 million or nearly 50% during the year under review.

In the cyclical course of ups and downs of the Mekong Committee the year 1965 reached the climax of success and achievements. It opened the construction phase and

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1. White & Sewell, op. cit., p. 63
2. White & Sewell, op. cit., p. 35.

inaugurated the first dam, the Nam Pung in Thailand, in November. President Johnson's initiative and offer had given the Mekong Committee a new momentum, vitality and confidence at a critical time when the Committee needed financial support and international cooperation to embark upon the second stage of the Lower Mekong Development Program.

As indicated earlier, the US attitude toward the process of Mekong regional cooperation changed drastically in 1965 from active but discreet mover to outspoken and passionate advocate of the Mekong Scheme, as correctly noted by Mr. Ridgeway in the New Republic:

> "Although the United States has been associated with the Mekong Scheme since its inception, it certainly has never argued for the plan with any of the passion Mr. Johnson has now given it."[1]

Three principal factors accounted for this change of attitude. First of all, there was the strong personality and personal interests of the President himself. Lyndon Johnson liked big, visionary and impressive plans like the TVA, which has memorably impressed many Americans. This explained his choice of the "majestic" Mekong river for the development of Southeast Asia and his equally "impressive" offer of one billion dollars.

Second, the war in Vietnam worsened in 1964 and air-

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1. The New Republic, April 24, 1965, p. 14.

strikes began in early 1965. This upset Lyndon Johnson very much. He did not want to go down in history as "a War-time President."[1] Consequently he needed some "works of peace," as he put it, to supplement or make up for military actions. His "works of peace" consited of building hospitals and schools, growing "wheat and corn, rice and cotton," assisting "in feeding and clothing the needy in Asia."[2] He was seriously concerned about raising Asian living standards.

Third, Communist China posed a grave threat to the stability and security of Southeast Asia. Before announcing his one billion dollars offer President Johnson analyzed the political situation of Asia in these terms:

> "Over this war (VN), and all Asia, is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China. The rulers in Hanoi are urged on by Peking. This is a regime which has destroyed freedom in Tibet, attacked India, and had been condemned by the UN for aggression in Korea."[3]

Observing that "the central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied," the President emphatically and forcefully added:

> "We must say in Southeast Asia, as we did in Europe, in the words of the Bible: Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."[4]

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1. Johnson, Lyndon B., The Choices We Face, New York: A Bantam Book, 1969
2. Johnson, Lyndon B., Speech at Johns Hopkins, April 7, 1965, in The Vietnam Reader, p. 348.
3. The Johns Hopkins' Speech, in The Vietnam Reader, p. 345.
4. Ibid., p. 345.

This meant the policy of "Containment of China" and constituted the central political incentive for Asian regionalism.

Indeed, President Johnson's offer of one billion dollars was motivated by political no less than economic calculations. The Mekong regional concept was devised by the US Administration in 1965 to cope with foreign and domestic pressures to negotiate an end to the VN war. The Mekong proposal combined five different goals: 1/ a peaceful economic alternative to military actions, 2/ a "cooperative effort for development" to stimulate regional coexistence and cooperation among riparian nations, 3/ a greater involvement of the UN and "other industrialized countries" in this regional development effort to lessen conflicts in this region, 4/ an eventual Soviet participation in order to widen the split between Moscow and Peking and 5/ an inducement to Hanoi to negotiate.[1]

The timing of the Mekong proposal was significant. It coincided with the stepped-up bombing of North Vietnam on the one hand, and the belief that the war would end soon on the other. As Mr. Huddle pointed out:

> "Apparently White House advisers foresaw a negotiated settlement soon, or a

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1. The Johns Hopkins Speech, in the Vietnam Reader, p. 348.

> collapse of North Vietnam in no more than four years or so."[1]

Therefore, according to him:

> "The President's Mekong Proposal, in short, was a concept of postwar reconstruction that he hoped would bring economic and political stability to the countries of the region, satisfy the diplomatic objectives of the United States, and prove acceptable to the other great powers of the world ("Including the Soviet Union"), as well as undercutting immediate motivation of the Vietnamese Communists..."[2]

Effectively, the Mekong concept was designed to increase regional economic development and at the same time reduce communist pressures on the region. Politically, it was hoped that the promising benefits of regional economic development would reduce the effects of the ideological appeals being exerted on non-communist countries by Communist China and North Vietnam on one hand, and possibly induce the latter to loosen its ties with Communist China and end its efforts to take over South Vietnam on the other. The aid offer and its great economic advantages were designed to prompt North Vietnam to join in Mekong regional cooperation and peace settlement.

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1. Huddle, Franklin P., The Mekong Project: Opportunities and Problems of Regionalism, prepared for the Sub-Committee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, May 1972, p. 33.

2. Ibid., pp. 33-34.

As expected, China denounced President Johnson's "carrot and stick trick" and protested against his use of the United Nations, whose "interference in the affairs of Indochina is impermissible":

> "In his 7 April Address, Johnson talked at length about the 'development' in which the United Nations is engaged in Southeast Asia, the Mekong river in particular. This was intended to facilitate the infiltration of the UN into Indochina. For this reason, US official circles have publicly 'welcome' Thant's plan to visit China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. And for the same reason, U Thant lost no time in 'welcoming' Johnson's 7 April address... No one will fail to see what they are up to in putting on the show."[1]

As for North Vietnam, its reactions were even stronger and angrier. It called the one billion dollar offer "the Stinking Bait" which Johnson "believes very attractive." On the contrary, North Vietnam claimed that "these are precisely calculations of stupid pirates: one billion dollars to buy all the peoples in Southeast Asia." It decried "US neo-colonialism!" and declared that "the Southeast Asian people have no need of those stinking dollars."[2]

This begs the questions as to whether it is possible at all to build an "Asian power base" among Southeast Asian nations with or without the neutralist or pro-Chinese states like Cambodia and North Vietnam. At this writing the Mekong

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1. FBIS, April 12, 1965, BBB 6
2. FBIS, April 12, 1965, JJ 5

Committee is certainly not a coherent bloc and has no bargaining power. Whether it could become a power center in international politics is too early to tell because regional cooperation is a very long and arduous process before it takes its final shape and substance.

By the same token the last political interest - conflict prevention and management - was far from being achieved in Mekong regional cooperation. The Mekong Committee was not originally an institution devised to settle regional conflicts and disputes. In 1965, this problem was tackled by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Mr. Bundy, who suggested that

> "Existing institutions should be expanded and strengthened to carry out expanding programs as effectively as possible."[1]

and reminded his audience the US national interest pursued by the President in Southeast Asia:

> "To end aggression as an instrument of national policy would bring great opportunities for progress and better welfare to unhappy millions throughout all of Asia. That is our goal in the United States and our only goal."[2]

The foregoing pages show the logic, consistency and coherency of US interests Mekong regional cooperation.

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1. Bundy, William, "Progress and Problems in the Far East," Address before the Far East-America Council of Commerce and Industry, New York, October 5, 1965, Department State Bulletin, November 1, 1965, pp. 709-716.

2. Ibid.

However, the policies which the US carried out to further the process of regional cooperation encountered conflicting interests between regional economic development and political security because of the bilateral ties between the US and the four riparian states. The Prek Thnot tributary project in Cambodia was a case in point.

After a long delay due to financing hurdles the Prek Thnot was assigned top priority in March 1966 by the Mekong Committee which decided to raise the necessary funds as soon as possible. The construction cost was estimated at $33 million, of which a third would be provided by Cambodia. The rest, $22 million, was to be provided by a combination of grants and soft loans. The key contributions would come from Japan and the United States. In spite of the rupture of diplomatic relations between the two countries the US government was willing to finance the Prek Thnot and pledged about $7 million.

Then, in September 1966, the US Congress amended the Foreign Assistance Act. The Findley Amendment forbade US assistance to any country "aiding" North Vietnam, thus holding up the US $7 million contribution to the Prek Thnot project in Cambodia.

The results of this action were damaging to the process of Mekong regional cooperation in many aspects. First, the American withdrawal led to a three-year delay in financing the Prek Thnot. From the economic point of view, the US inaction slowed the regional economic development of the

Mekong valley. Second, the American withdrawal missed an opportunity to harmonize regional disparities in levels of development by provoking what Myrdal has called a "distribution crisis" of unequal benefits of regional cooperation. By 1966, Thailand, the most prosperous and stable country among the four riparians, got two dams completed whereas Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam did not have projects underway until 1969 or later.

Politically, the US action promoted regional conflict rather than regional cooperation. It did not bring about regional collective security but regional political instability. It did not work toward containment of China but rather toward a rapprochement between Peking and Phnom Penh. Cambodia called off the December 1966 meeting of the Mekong Committee and boycotted the next one scheduled for February 1967. During those years Cambodia's relationship with its neighbors deteriorated considerably over territorial incursions or violations, as Prince Sihanouk already charged in September 1965:

> "Cambodia's aversion for America stems from her action in furnishing the Bangkok and Saigon regimes ... with an enormous material financial and military potential, and has thus enabled them to threaten our territorial integrity, our regime and the peaceful condition we at present enjoy."[1]

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1. Norodom Sihanouk, "What do our Independence and Neutrality Really Denote?", Kambuja, September 15, 1965.

US action on the Prek Thnot in 1966 did not reconcile or alleviate regional political differences between Cambodia and its Vietnamese and Thai neighbors. On the contrary it heightened Cambodia's traditional fears and suspicions of the governments of Bangkok and Saigon which - with American aid and support - could threaten Cambodia's security under the guise of anti-communism.

Furthermore, the Prek Thnot example cast a doubt on what an editorial of Le Sangkum entitled "The (political) Disinterestedness of American Aid to the Mekong Committee,"[1] raised the question of US commitment to Mekong regional co-operation, as spelled out by President Johnson in his Johns Hopkins Speech. The answer to this problem was given by Mr. Bundy who stated that the United States has "supported the work of the Mekong Development Committee" but on the other hand he made it clear that "we shall continue to work where necessary on a bilateral basis, particularly where security factors remain a major element in the problem."[2]

To conclude, if US interests in the Mekong regional cooperation were sound and coherent the policies practiced by the United States in meeting its objectives were sometimes contradictory, as for example the contradiction between regional economic development and political security

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1. Le Sangkum, April 1967.

2. Bundy, William, "Progress and Problems in the Far East," Department State Bulletin, November 1, 1965, pp. 709-716.

or containment of China. In the final analysis, US policy in the Mekong regional cooperation was more conservative and less revolutionary than the spirit of President Johnson's Johns Hopkins Speech.

As to the other three powers' involvement, the policy of the United States up to 1970 was to encourage Japan, tolerate the Soviet Union, and ignore or boycott Communist China. Since the People's Republic of China was not a member of the United Nations or ECAFE until 1971, the question of Peking's attitude and actions regarding the Mekong Project was not germane or important during 1955-1971 for US policy. For the future the Nixon Administration would probably welcome and encourage China's participation in the Mekong Project. Regarding the Soviet Union, the United States periodically, but not too vigorously, tried to persuade Moscow to participate actively in the Project. President Johnson's call for Soviet cooperation in his Johns Hopkins' Speech of April 1965 was a high-level public expression of this policy. In contrast, the United States constantly sought to increase Japanese interest and participation in the Lower Mekong Development Program.[1]

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1. Black, Eugene R., Alternative in Southeast Asia, N.Y.: Praeger, 1969, Ch. III on "Japan Ought...", pp. 67-89.

Chapter VII

The Japanese Participation in The Mekong Project

The Japanese role in Mekong regional cooperation can only be understood in the context of Tokyo's postwar policy toward Southeast Asia (SEA). This policy is both simple and complex. It is simple because it has been directed mainly toward economic assistance and development without political strings or qualifications. Japanese technical and financial aid was given to SEA states regardless of their political alignments and alliances. It is complex, however, because Japan did not or could not develop a clear focus or a significant role for promoting SEA regional cooperation. While recognizing that it was the first Asian economic Great Power in the area Japan felt unsure and insecure about its leadership. Its commitment to regional cooperation was unpretentious, undramatic and unclear. Japan seemed more interested in Asian Development on a bilateral individual assistance than in Asian regional cooperation in a broader framework.

The difficulties for Japan in defining its role of an Asian regional Power acting as a catalyst of SEA regional cooperation stem from its postwar ambivalent attitudes and ambiguous policies toward SEA countries. Its economic interests in Southeast Asia were also changing and discontinuous.

To begin with, Japan had mixed feelings of hope and fear toward SEA nations. As the third largest country in

the world in terms of GNP, Japan hoped to "take the lead" in Southeast Asia and to "act like a big brother to the countries in the region," as Mr. Akira Onishi put it.[1] On the other hand, Japan strongly feared anti-Japanese feeling and antipathy directed toward itself. Expressions like "ugly Japanese," "economic animal" or "yellow Yankee,"[2] to use Mr. Onishi's terms, pointed up the psychological problems of Japan in dealing with its Asian neighbors.

These two ambivalent attitudes toward Southeast Asia were the legacy of Tokyo's wartime policy of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere established by the first Konoye government in November 1938. John Toland who studied this period of Japanese history (1936-1945) in The Rising Sun defined the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere as:

> "a policy that envisaged an Asia united 'in the spirit of universal brotherhood' under the leadership of Japan, with each nation alloted its 'proper place' by the Emperor; it would lead to peace and prosperity."[3]

This was the first attempt at Asian regionalism experienced by Japan. It was both successful and distasteful for many Japanese and Southeast Asians as well. Asia was

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1. Akira Onishi, "Japanese Interests in Southeast Asia - A Japanese View," Paper No.11-(c) for the Meeting of Overseas Development Council, October 15-17, 1970, p. 2.
2. Ibid., p. 10.
3. Toland, John, The Rising Sun, New York: Random House, 1970, p. 562.

at last freed from Western domination. Japan helped Asia regain its pride, its sense of identity, and its independence. Admiration for Japan was felt all over Southeast Asia. On the cther hand, the harshness of Japanese military occupation left deep bitterness, resentment and apprehension among SEA people. The Japanese acted as foreigners, not like Asians, and often worse than the Western colonialists. This unfortunate wartime experience left ambivalent feelings on both sides which are still expressed. In the late sixties, when Japan's "conspicuous economic growth"[1] made it the second richest producer in the Free World after the United States, Japanese economic assistance was needed but feared at the same time among SEA countries. Conversely, Japan hoped that its participation in this troubled region would be accepted but feared that any expression of Japanese leadership would be resented and rejected.

Likewise, Tokyo's postwar policies toward SEA nations fluctuated. In general they remained dependent upon US leadership in this region, as the Mekong case will show. But quite a few times they followed their their own course. Unlike Australia, for example, Japan did not have troops in South Vietnam but did have economic trade with North Vietnam.

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1. Masataka Kosaka, "International Politics of Super-Powers An Asia," The Asia Quarterly, Volume 2, No. 3, July 1970, p. 210.

With regard to Japanese policies of regional economic cooperation in Asia since the end of World War II, Dr. Saburo Okita, President of the Japanese Economic Research Center in Tokyo and adviser of an informal steering committee known as "Mekong International Japan" set up also in Tokyo, distinguished "four approximate stages." The first stage (1952-1958) "opened with the start of reparation payments" for wartime damages. The second stage (1958-1965) was characterized by "economic cooperation in the forms of loans and investments." The third stage (1965-1968) marked an important period of Japanese regional consciousness and activities. According to Dr. Okita, "economic aid became an integral part of Japan's overall Asian policy." As he expanded:

> "It was in this stage, marked by the emergence of a conscious attempt to give regional priority to East and Southeast Asia, that Japan concluded agreements for economic cooperation with Taiwan and South Korea, became an active participant in establishing the Asian Development Bank, and took initiative in convoking the Southeast Asia Ministerial Conference for Economic Development."[1]

Finally, the fourth stage began in the spring of 1969 with Japanese moves to increase its technical and economic assistance to Southeast Asia. In April 1969, Foreign Aichi

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1. Saburo Okita, "Japanese Economic Cooperation in Asia in the 1970s," in Japanese-American Relations in the 1970's ed. by Gerald Curtis, Washington D.C., Columbia Books Inc., 1970, pp. 95-96.

stated that "the Japanese GNP might well reach the level of $500 billion by 1980, and the magnitude of economic co-operation which will then be extended by Japan will exceed levels we can now conceive of."[1] About a week later Finance Minister Fukuda expressed his "desire to double the flow of our aid to the Asian region within the coming five years."[2] Thus, as Dr. Okita asserted, "Japan has begun to accept a positive commitment to economic cooperation in Asia."[3]

Those ambivalent attitudes and policies were compounded by the discontinuity of Japanese economic interests in Southeast Asia. From 1952 to 1954, after Japan resumed diplomatic relations with most SEA governments, it was enthusiastically interested in Southeast Asia, which was looked upon "as a crucial export market and as a source of natural resources needed by Japanese industry."[4] Japanese exports to Southeast Asia totalled about 40%.

However, this high interest in Southeast Asia declined substantially during the ten following years (1955-1965). By 1966, Japanese exports to Southeast Asia fell to 26%. Instead, Japan diverted and increased its trade toward

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1. Saburo Okita, "Japanese Economic Cooperation in Asia in the 1970s," in Japanese-American Relations in the 1970's, ed. by Gerald Curtis, Washington D.C., Columbia Books Inc., 1970, p. 96.

2. Ibid., p. 96.

3. Ibid., p. 99

4. Dr. Okita in Curtis, op. cit., p. 100.

developed countries of the United States, Europe and Australia. The disappointment with Southeast Asia was expressed by Prime Minister Yoshida who declared after an official visit to Southeast Asia in 1954 that "you have to trade with rich men; you can't trade with beggars."[1]

Two main reasons accounted for Japanese loss of interest in Southeast Asia during this period. First, there was what Dr. Okita described as "the rather unsympathetic receiption given by SEA nations" to the concept of "combining American capital with Japanese technology for the development of Southeast Asia."[2] At the Bandung Conference in the spring of 1955, Japanese delegates sensed that their Asian colleagues were still "suspicious of Japanese intentions and feared their economic penetration or even their territorial ambitions."[3]

Second, political internal disorders and problems of economic growth following independence plagued many SEA nations and discouraged Japan. Consequently, Southeast Asia could not offer great business markets nor raw materials as expected by Tokyo.

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1. Quoted in Lawrence Olson's Japan in Postwar Asia, New York: Praeger, 1971, p. 38.
2. Dr. Okita in Curtis, op. cit., p. 100.
4. Olson, Lawrence, op. cit., p. 24.

Since 1965, Japan focused its attention and interest in Southeast Asia again. Economic and political factors were responsible for this revival of interest. Economically, Dr. Okita singled out three major changes. First, "the SEA share of Japanese trade began to show a modest upward trend." Second, a new pattern of trade emerged with SEA nations. The vertical pattern of trade relations with the region, according to which SEA raw materials had been exchanged for Japanese finished goods, was expected to be replaced by a horizontal pattern "in which various manufactured goods are exchanged." These expectations in turn "stimulated various kinds of Japanese private investment and joint ventures in the region." Third, as already mentioned, Tokyo adopted a new attitude toward its foreign aid which was to be considered as integral part of its all Asian policy.[1]

Tentative plans for an over-all SEA development and trade in the "postwar Vietnam" perspective were formulated. In 1968 former Foreign Minister Takeo Miki called for an international fund for the rehabilitation of Southeast Asia. In addition to the "Miki Plan" Finance Minister Fukuda proposed a five-to-ten year program of aid to Southeast Asia, including funds from private investment sources. The rationale behind these two proposals, as accurately stated by a student of Japanese affairs, was "that if Japan intends

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1. Dr. Okita in Curtis, op. cit., p. 104.

to hold its markets in Southeast Asia it had better get its pump-priming and good will activities off the ground."[1]

Politically, US President Johnson's Johns Hopkins Speech in April 1965, gave Japan the necessary assurance and impetus to assume a greater role in Southeast Asia. The President vigorously supported the formation of the Asian Development Bank which the Japanese wanted located in Tokyo. American officials urged Japan to take on the role of "leadership" in East Asia. In an interview of July 15, 1966, former Defense Secretary McNamara presented the American view of "Japan's future role in Asia" as follows:

> "I think your role there, as I say, should be one of leadership; it should also be one of assistance - growing assistance, particularly economic assistance - to the developing nations of Asia."[2]

Mr. Eugene Black, President Johnson's special consultant on Southeast Asia, visited Tokyo in 1965 to discuss increasing Japanese participation in SEA regional activities.[3]

Under the direction of Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, Japan concurred in the American policy of supporting regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Besides its leading role

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1. Lockheimer, F. Roy, "Further Vietnamese Reflections in a Japanese Mirror," American Universities Field Staff Report, Vol. XVI, No. 11, p. 12.

2. McNamara, Robert, "Japan's Future Role in Asia," American Foreign Policy, 1966, Doc. IX-60, p. 700.

3. Black, Eugene R., Alternative in Southeast Asia, New York: Praeger, 1969, Ch. III on "Japan Ought...," pp. 67-89.

role in promoting regional organizations such as the ADB and ASPAC, Tokyo undertook a few diplomatic moves in Southeast Asia. In the fall of 1967, Prime Minister Sato accompanied by a few Cabinet members paid an official visit to most SEA nations including South Vietnam. Japan's commitment to SEA regional cooperation became more positive and its participation in regional programs more active. In 1970, Japan played a prominent part in the organization, deliberations, and implementation of the Djakarta Conference of eleven Asian and Pacific nations on Cambodia. While the Conference did not end the war or free Cambodia, it did see Japan take a political initiative and play a leading role in a controversial international matter involving the big powers and regional states. Meanwhile Japan continued important discussions in the annual meetings of the Ministerial Conference for the Economic Development of Southeast Asia, although Japan did not use that forum as a funnel for chanelling Japanese aid into regional projects. All this activity did not mean a Japanese take-over of US leadership in this region, nor an assertion of any Japanese leadership. Tokyo was not yet ready for either.

The next stage of Japanese relationship with Southeast Asia will take one or two forms: either an increase of independent involvement or a decrease of Japanese activities in Southeast Asia. In the first case Japan will become a "challenger in the power structure of international

politics"[1] and assert its own economic and political interests in Southeast Asia separate and divergent from the US interests and activities. The recent Japanese decision to undertake economic and quasi-diplomatic relations with Hanoi is one example. Japan will try to establish close working relations with several governments in the region such as Thailand, Indonesia and North Vietnam. Japan will provide increasing large programs of economic grants, investments and technical assistance in Southeast Asia on a bilateral and multilateral basis. Japan will seek to become the principal donor and supporter of economic development and regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. The main thrust of Japanese assertive autonomous policy will reside in the fact that Tokyo could deal equally with all SEA governments regardless of their social systems and political alignments, which Washington cannot do.

In the second case, Japan might decide to revise and redefine its interests in Southeast Asia for the 1970's in the light of many disturbing events in Asian and world politics. The VN war was far from being settled, Cambodia became a battlefield, Laos was critical and Thailand underwent a military coup in the fall of 1971. If the picture of mainland Southeast Asia was not encouraging, maritime SEA regional actions were not promising for Japan either. Whether ASEAN nations' advocacy of the "neutralization of

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1. Masataka Kosaka, art. cit., p. 209.

Southeast Asia" should involve Japan as a Great Power guarantor of this formula or, on the contrary, preclude any Japanese role in this region was still uncertain.

What is certain was that Japan would need a larger market than Asia in the 1970's, as Dr. Okita predicted:

> "From the point of view of raw material supply, it is unrealistic for Japan to set up an exclusive economic bloc with Asian neighbours and try to develop Japan on that basis."[1]

He also suggested that

> "...it is not to be desired that the world be linked by vertical ties between specific groups of developed countries and specific groups of developing countries as Japan-Asia, the United States-Latin America and Europe-Africa. If such relations are strengthened it might give rise to regionalism resulting in trouble as certain recent examples show."[2]

Finally, the "Nixon Shocks" in the summer of 1971 - the Peking overture and New Economic Policy - following American change of attitude and policy toward East Asia might well lead Japan into a position of isolation, retreat and soul-searching instead of a world power challenger.

To recapitulate, Japanese interest in SEA countries went up and down. It was very high after the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, lowered after 1955 for approximately ten years, revived around 1965-66, and probably wavered for the 1970's.

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1. Quoted in D. Wilson's Asia Awakes, A Mentor Book, 1970, p. 221.

2. Saburo Okita, "Japan and Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia," Paper presented at a SEADAG meeting in New York in June 1970, p. 27.

Japan's role in Mekong regional cooperation must be analyzed against this background. The Mekong region was not unfamiliar to Tokyo. Japan's first concrete interest in the Mekong countries dated back to June 1940 when it entered into a Treaty of Friendship with Thailand. The following year, in May 1941, a Thai-Indochinese border dispute provided Tokyo with a good opportunity to play its first positive role in the Mekong riparian affairs. Through Japanese mediation the border dispute was brought to an end and a treaty was concluded to the great advantage of Thailand. On the same occasion Tokyo obtained guarrantees from both Thai and French sides that neither of them would enter into agreements with any third power hostile to Japan. Furthermore, Japanese-Thai friendship was consolidated by a mutual pact of alliance signed on December 21, 1941. Then came the last spectacular and dramatic intervention of Japan in this area. On March 9, 1945, the Japanese seized control of all Indochina and abolished French colonial rule overnight. At the same time Tokyo granted independence to Annam, Tonkin and Cambodia, and declared that it had no territorial design on these countries. Japanese military occupation of Indochina ended with Tokyo's surrender to the Allies on August 14, 1945.

After the war, Tokyo signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty on September 8, 1951. Four years later, in 1955, Japan opened diplomatic relations with the three new independent states of Cambodia, Laos and the Republic of

Vietnam established by the Geneva Accords of July 21, 1954. In April 1955 it restored diplomatic relations with Bangkok which chose to terminate the 1941 alliance pact in 1945.

To understand the nature and scope of Japanese interest in the Lower Mekong Development it is necessary to relate Japan's participation to these different stages of Japanese economic interests and policies in Southeast Asia. Japan entered into the Mekong Project as its interest in Southeast Asia declined from 1955 to 1965. Then in 1966, for political and economic reasons already mentioned, Japanese interest in SEA countries revived and increased until the Nixon Shocks in the summer of 1971. Japan's participation in the Mekong Project accordingly expanded.

Consistent with its general interests and policies in Southeast Asia, Japanese participation in the Mekong Project thus comprised two different periods. The first period, from 1958 to 1965, was characterized by a very low posture of Japan in the Lower Mekong Scheme. By contrast, from 1966 to 1970, the Japanese role in this project became increasingly significant and even indispensable.

In December 1958 the government of Japan showed its first interest in the Mekong Project and offered to undertake a reconnaissance survey of the major tributaries of the Mekong Basin for two years and at a cost of $240,000 to be borne by Japan. This small offer signaled the indications of an initial Japanese interest in the Project. Actually, Japan's concrete and firm commitment to the Mekong Project

started coincidentally with the end of reparation of payments. In May 1959 Tokyo signed a reparations agreement with the Republic of Vietnam[1] and later similar ones with Laos and Cambodia. They facilitated Japanese interest and participation in the Mekong Project, but were limited and unconspicuous at first.

During the first period (1958-65) Japanese contribution to the Mekong Committee's operational resources was rather small though not negligible. Japan pledges amounted to some $1,089,496 out of a total of $105,064,147 by December 31, 1965. As part of its river tributary reconnaissance, Japan accepted the suggestion to design the dam and hydroelectric generation aspects of the Prek Thnot in Cambodia. The Japanese government also offered to prepare a feasibility report for the Nam Pung in Thailand, and a report on the hydrologic installations of the Upper Se Pok in South Vietnam. Another significant Japanese contribution to the Mekong Scheme was the feasibility investigations of the Sambor mainstream project which cost $0.7 million. Contrary to major donor countries, Japan was not at first interested in construction work. Japanese technical aid and financial contribution were given only for pre-investment investigations and planning purposes.

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1. Japan agreed to build the Da Nhim Dam (1960-65) which cost $39 million.

Then in 1965 Japan embarked upon a new phase of regional economic policy marked by an awakening and strengthening of Japanese regional consciousness and activities in Southeast Asia. The second period (1966-70) witnessed an acceleration of Japanes effort in furthering Mekong regional development and cooperation in many aspects.

In early 1966, Japan granted about $4.5 million for its first major construction project, the Nam Ngum dam in Laos.[1] In 1969 Japan made a second important contribution. It agreed to pledge $8.43 million (half grant and half soft loans) to the construction of the Prek Thnot in Cambodia. Japan also prepared a feasibility report of the Vientiane-Nong Khai bridge in 1969. By December 31, 1970 total Japanese pledges to the Mekong Committee had increased from $1,089,496 in 1965 to $15,258,465.

Moreover, to this technical aid and financial contribution was added an administrative assistance to the Mekong Committee. In 1969, a Japanese Foreign Service Officer, Mr. Shigeru Inada, was appointed the first associate executive agent of the Mekong Committee. This was interpreted as the Foreign Ministry's move to enhance its role in Mekong Development and play an influence in policy-making process. However, Mr. Shigeru left that position and returned to the

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1. Funding was arranged as part of the bilateral economic and technical cooperation agreement signed between Laos and Japan, in lieu of reparations. Construction was supervised by Nippon Koei Co. and completed in less than two years (February 1970 - December 1971).

service of his government a year later in April 1970. His post remains vacant.

Three aspects can be discerned in Japanese participation in the Mekong Project. They concern the scope, nature and policy of this participation.

The scope of Japanese participation in the Lower Mekong Development Program shows a remarkable evolution. It has moved from technical investigations to constructions works and administrative task. It involved successively the Electric Power Development Company, OTCA (Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency set up in 1962), Nippon Koei and other firms, and finally the Japanese Foreign Ministry. The "Mekong International Japan" committee included among its members such key figures in SEA policy as Mr. Ataru Kobayashi, former head of the Japan Development Bank, later president of Arabian Oil, and the man behind oil exploration in Indonesia; Mr. Kyutaro Ozawa, a member of Japan's House of Councilors and president of the International Engineering Consultants Association; and Mr. Ryotaro Takai, former president of the Tokyo Electric Power Company. Advisers included Mr. Yutaka Kubota of Nippon Koei Company, Dr. Koichi Aki, chief of ECAFE's Bureau of Flood Control and Water Resources Development and Dr. Saburo Okita of the famous Economic Research Center.[1]

Although bilateral aid was and still remains the

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1. Olson, Lawrence, op. cit., p. 219.

dominant practice of Japanese regional economic cooperation with the Mekong states, however, the fact that Tokyo was willing to give funds to be administered by the World Bank or an equivalent international agency as in the case of the Nam Ngum and Prek Thnot proved that "the importance of multilateral cooperation through international organization has lately come to be recognized in Japan."[1] This new attitude was reached in 1969 when the Japanese role in Mekong regional development grew not only active but also omnipresent - on the field and at the damsite as well as in the Mekong Secretariat and on the Advisory Board.

Indeed, the nature of Japanese participation is unique. Like any other donor country Japan has participated in the operational resources of the Mekong Committee. Japanese contribution was in grants, solft loans or in lieu of reparations. But unlike many donor countries[2], Japan also contributed manpower. Japanese physical presence in the Mekong valley was expanding - especially in Laos - and stood rather exceptional. Japanese technicians, engineers and

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1. Dr. Okita, "Japan and Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia," SEADAG paper, June 1970, p. 6.

2. A striking example is the Federal Republic of Germany which was the second largest donor country after the US with a total contribution of $17,002,500 by December 1970. But there was no German physical presence on the field or in the Secretariat.

supervisors worked and lived in the Jungles, penetrated the most remote and dangerous areas where governmental troops and Westerners could not go. Japanese personnel and vehicles (recognizable by Japanese flags) seemed to enjoy special consideration from the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese.

In January 1971 while Lao and foreign officials flew by helicopter to the Nam Ngum (located about 35 miles North of Vientiane), I took a ride in a Japanese car which was used to bring food and other supplies from the capital to the Japanese community living at the damsite. During the lonely ride on a deserted road I ask my Japanese host whether he had encountered any difficulties with "the other side." He replied: "With that (showing me the Japanese flag on the window of the car) you don't have to be afraid of anything."

This experience pointed out the apolitical character of Japanese participation. The Japanese role in the Mekong regional cooperation has been essentially economic and "humanitarian" working for the welfare of all people. It was on these two grounds that the Japanese got the promise of the Pathet Lao not to attack the damsite.[1] That promise was kept.[2] Except for a few minor incidents in 1969 Nam

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1. Interview with Mr. Teruo Yoshimatsu, project manager of the Nam Ngum dam in January 1971, at the damsite.

2. According to a Lao source, it was kept because the Nam Ngum was a project dear to, and dreamed of by, Prince Souvannavong, the Pathet Lao leader.

Ngum damsite was an "island of peace" in this troubled region. In fact, the project was completed ahead of schedule.

The last aspect of Japanese participation in the Mekong Scheme deals with its foreign economic policy which lacked a clear political concept and strategy of region-building and political development in this conflicted area. As in many other parts of Asia, Japan's foreign policy with regard to the Mekong Project pursued "only immediate commercial interests, refusing to take a clear stand on any of the major political issues of Asia, and avoiding any kind of initiative that might commit her to a firm position."[1] In effect, Tokyo's role in promoting regional cooperation among Mekong riparian nations needed conceptual thinking. It was too narrowly geared to technical and financial aid.

In 1969, when the Foreign Ministry sent Mr. Shigeru Inada to the Mekong Secretariat, the move was welcomed by riparian Mekong officials as Tokyo's willingness to play a more active and important role in the Mekong Scheme. However, Mr. Shigeru Inada left his post a year later, missed the opportunity to prove the energy, wisdom and capabilities of Japan "as the core nation of non-Communist Asia"[2] and failed to take on the leadership role in Mekong regional

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1. Yung-Hwan Jo, "Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia and Japan's Role," The Journal of Politics, Vol. 30, August 1968, p. 785.

2. Ibid., p. 781.

development. As Yung-Hwan Jo correctly pointed out:

> "Japan's leadership role in Southeast Asia will be enhanced if Japan, through projects such as this, provides insights into possibilities of dealing with some of the root causes of the present turmoil in Vietnam."[1]

Instead, Japan's Mekong policy, since 1958, has been one of deferring to US leadership. This has meant a policy of "watching and following the US initiative." In 1961, when the US agreed to carry out the feasibility investigations of the Pa Mong project, Japan followed the move by agreeing to carry out the same investigations for the Sambor project. In 1965, after the US took the initiative to grant about $13 million for the construction of the Nam Ngum dam in Laos, in the wake of President Johnson's pledge to put $1 billion into Asian development, Japan agreed to contribute some $4.5 million for the same project. Again in 1966 for the Prek Thnot dam in Cambodia Japan consented to match the US contribution in pledging $7 million. But when the Findley amendment was passed by US Congress the US Administration had to hold up the $7 million pledge to help finance the project. It was reported that word of the US hold-up "caused Prime Minister Sato to blow up verbally at Mr. Eugene Black"[2] who was sent to Tokyo to ask the Japanese to

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1. Yung-Hwan Jo, "Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia and Japan's Role," The Journal of Politics, Vol. 30, August 1968, p. 790.

2. The New York Times, February 28, 1967.

make up for the US turnabout. Prime Minister Sato explained that Japan in pledging $7 million "wanted to establish a parity relationship with the US for such contributions and now would be put on the spot for more."[1] Once more in 1969, Tokyo preferred to wait for Washinton's green light for the construction of the My-Thuan bridge in Vietnam. In the meantime Japan's official position was that it would "give favorable consideration."[2]

Given the ambivalence of its attitudes toward SEA nations, the fluidity of its interests and the ambiguity of its policies in this region, the future role of Japan in Mekong regional development and cooperation is difficult to ascertain. The Mekong Project could be an asset for Japan to accumulate technical know-how and develop commercial and industrial activities brought about by the power generated by the dams on one hand, and to play a leading role in planning for a "new co-prosperity sphere building around exploitation of regional resources"[3] of the rich Mekong valley, on the other. But the Mekong Project could also be a liability for Japan in case poor security conditions stop construction works, North Vietnam and its allies obstruct the continuation of the whole Mekong Scheme, or

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1. The New York Times, February 28, 1967.
2. Interview with a Japanese official at the Japanese Embassy in Saigon, in February 1971.
3. Olson, Lawrence, op. cit. p. 222.

the four riparian governments cannot agree on how to proceed with the next stages of the Mekong Development.

In any case the Mekong Project cannot be discarded in the agonizing reassessment of Japan's future political and economic role in Southeast Asia during the 1970's.

JAPANESE PARTICIPATION IN THE MEKONG PROJECT*

FY	Projects	Costs	No. Exp.	Organiz. Concerned
'58	Mainstream Reconn	19,664	18	GA, NKK, EPDC[1]
'59	Ditto	35,080	21	Ditto
'60	Ditto	30,418	18	Ditto
'61	Nam Gam (Thai)	26,256	15	GA, EPDC
	Prek Thnot (KR)	20,656	13	NKK
	Sre Pok (VN)	840	1	NKK
	Sambor	24,681	15	GA, NKK, EPDC
	Total	73,034		
'62	Sambor	48,538	31	GA, NKK, EPDC, PC[2]
	Sre Pok	13,896	9	NKK
	Total	62,434		
'63	Sambor	49,158	26	NKK, EPDC
	Sre Pok	13,760	6	NKK
	Total	62,918		
'64	Sambor	50,093	10	GA, EPDC
	Sre Pok	11,920	6	NKK
	Total	62,013		
'65	Sambor	39,336	14	GA, SCI[3]
	Sre Pok	675		NKK
	Nam Ngum	24,000		NKK
	Total	64,011		
'66	Sambor	54,207	16	GA, EPDC, SCI
	Nam Ngum	79,712		NKK
	Total	133,919		
'67	Great Lake (KR)	29,623	7	SCI
'68	Great Lake	48,269	29	SCI, GA
	Railway (Laos)	11,852	5	NKK
	Sambor	4,000	5	
	Total	64,120		
'69	Great Lake, Sambor	56,916		SCI, GA

* This table was prepared by Mr. Ninomi, an OTCA official in charge of Mekong affairs, for the writer in Tokyo, on April 21, 1972.

JAPANESE PARTICIPATION IN THE MEKONG PROJECT (Cont'd)

Total Contribution as of December 31, 1971

- Pre-investment Investigation	$1,555,430
- Investment for Construction of Nam Ngum & Prek Thnot	$13,907,000
Total	$15,462,430

Abbreviations

1. GA = Government Agency
   NKK = Nippon Koei K.
   EPDC = Electric Power Development Co.
2. PC = Post Consultant
3. SCI = Sanyu Consultant International

Chapter VIII

The International Organizations Roles in the Mekong Regional Cooperation

The role of international organizations in promoting regional cooperation and integration in the developing world has received increasing attention and recommendations since the late sixties, as bilateral aid became more difficult to handle. The Pearson study, Partners in Development, called international organizations and especially regional agencies and development banks "the standard-bearers of integration,"[1] and urged them to play a more active role in regional cooperation. Both the developing nations and the donor countries came to press for such a role in the management of aid for different reasons. For the former, multilateral aid is less likely to involve political implications and allows greater freedom in its use. To the latter, multilateral aid offers a "lower profile" in the developing world and a "true internationalism," that is, a more equitable "burden sharing" among donors.

In this chapter we will examine the roles of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), or the World Bank

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1. Pearson, Lester B., & others, Partners in Development, New York: Praeger, 1969, p. 214

and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Mekong regional cooperation. Although distinct and separate organs, they all operate directly or indirectly under the aegis of the United Nations. They conduct different functional activities, whose common denominator has been to promote regional co-operation and integration among developing countries. Both the IBRD and ADB were new and recent participants in the Lower Mekong Development in the late sixties, a decade after the Project started under the auspices of ECAFE and the support of UNDP/Special Fund. Therefore, in discussing the roles of these four international organizations, those of the IBRD and ADB are to be seen as more potential than actual.

To help bring about regional development and cooperation in the Mekong region the ECAFE, UNDP, IBRD and ADB have each played at least one of three important roles: political, administrative or economic. Sometimes only an international agency can offer acceptable political auspices for convening national representatives on neutral ground. In ways no one of them can provide, it serves as sponsor of terms of reference, referee of deliberations, conciliator of differences, promoter of consensus and monitor of developments. The uniqueness of international organizations is that their apolitical character - advocated in principle and carried out in practice - has helped them at times play a more positive and fruitful political role than any Big Power could. To bring together four antagonistic governments with

different political regimes and political international alignments and induce them into Mekong regional cooperation was to say the least a skillful and successful political act accomplished by ECAFE and UNDP in the late fifties. In the early seventies when the Cambodian government of Lon Nol, the Laotian government of Prince Souvanna Phouma, the Thai government of Thanom Kittikatchorn and the Vietnamese government of Nguyen Van Thieu,all agreed to call upon the IBRD and ADB for "a more active participation" in the Lower Mekong Development Project, they expressed a political choice, decision and consensus in the truest sense to obtain the auspices of those two financial institutions.[1]

The administrative role is narrower but equally important. It provides the administrative support to help set up, man, and operate the machinery of regional cooperation. International organizations can furnish the professional staff, procedural advice, systems analysis and specialized equipment for managing regional agencies.

The economic role is crucial. International organizations are indispensable for supplying the money and know-how for planning, constructing and operating regional projects. Loans, grants, technical assistance and project appraisals are the principal contributions made by the economic role of international organizations involved in the

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1. Through their representatives at the Mekong Committee meeting in Vientiane, in January 1971.

Lower Mekong Project.

I.- The Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE)

The ECAFE was set up in Shanghai, in 1947. After the Communist victories in Mainland China, the ECAFE Secretariat was moved to Singapore for two weeks, in December 1948, before it settled down permanently in Bangkok, in 1949. In 25 years ECAFE's membership rose from ten countries in 1947 -most of them non-Asian - to 30 countries in 1972. Twenty-five are in the pan-Asian region from Iran to Japan including South Korea and South Vietnam but not North Korea nor North Vietnam. Five members come from outside the region: France, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States. In October 1971, ECAFE's membership assumed a widened scope with the admission of the People's Republic of China.

ECAFE is the regional arm of the United Nations. It has provided a stable and continuing regional forum for the member states to meet and work together in spite of rivalries and conflicts among them. ECAFE's regional role, in the view of its Executive-Secretary, Mr. U Nyun, has been "the product of two main concepts":

> "First, in substantive efforts, ECAFE acts as a Pan-Asian instrument to formulate and carry forward the increasing numbers and range of development projects and programmes that **are regional and subregional** in scope. Second, as an organizational or operational medium, it has become a regional spring-board for the United Nations systems

and for those countries which co-operate through international programmes..."[1]

The concept of ECAFE as the spring-board for global agency contributions to regional development is illustrated by the Mekong Project, "in that it provides a framework of action to no less than twenty-six cooperating countries and eleven agencies."[2]

Moreover, the ECAFE's region-building role has been constructive, helpful and necessary in the Mekong case. ECAFE has been called the "prime mover and mainstay" of the Project, "the central planning agency" of the Mekong Committee, the "seed support" and even the "nursemaid" to the Project. It has provided continuous help in all practical and technical problems through its Secretariat, its Bureau of Flood Control and Water Resources Development and other divisions.

The ECAFE Secretariat has tremendously assisted the Mekong Committee in the performance of the latter's functions, particularly from 1958 to 1964 during which the Office of the Executive Agent was still insignificant. It assumed the administrative responsibilities of convening the Committee's meetings and making "necessary arrangements for consultation, including the preparation of documents, the holding of meetings and the drafting of records."[3]

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1. ECAFE - Twenty-Five Years, E/CN.11/1025, Bangkok, March 1972, Foreward by U Nyun, p. vi.

2. Ibid.

3. Mekong Committee, Rules of Procedure, articles 2 and 4.

In the context of the present study, what is strikingly significant has been the political role played by ECAFE in fostering and facilitating cooperation between the contentious partners of the Lower Mekong region. We have seen the leading role of ECAFE in the establishment of the Mekong Committee in 1957. Because of the international and internal political situation in this area at that paritcular time ECAFE was the most acceptable political auspices in the eyes of the four governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam. Or as David Wightman put it, "It is, in fact, the political problems surrounding the Mekong Project that underline the importance of ECAFE's umbrella function... This largely technical operation began under ECAFE in the first place for essentially political reasons."[1]

The ECAFE's political role of go-between, conciliator and diplomatic broker, or "political nursing," to use Wightman's terms, has been often called upon in the later development of the Mekong Committee. In December 1958, just one year after the establishment of the Mekong Committee, Cambodia broke off its diplomatic relations with Thailand over the location of the Temple of Preah Vihear, the two ambassadors were recalled, the frontier was closed and air traffic was suspended between Phnom Penh and Bangkok. The ECAFE Secretariat in Bangkok and the Regional Representative

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1. Wightman, D., Toward Economic Cooperation in Asia, p. 201

of the UN Technical Assistance Board in Phnom Penh deployed all their efforts and made special arrangements to allow the Cambodian delegation to attend a very important meeting of the Mekong Committee in Bangkok scheduled at that critical time. US authorities placed a plane at the disposal of the Cambodian delegation and visas for the Cambodian delegates were waiting for them at the Bangkok airport. On their arrival, they were cordially greeted by Thai officials. Mr. Sonn Voeunsai, head of the Cambodian delegation, declared that his government had permitted him to come to Bangkok because of his personal confidence in Dr. Binson, in the Mekong Committee and in the United Nations. On the other hand, Thai Prime Minister Sarit took care to announce on radio that the Cambodian delegation had arrived as representatives attending a meeting under the United Nations auspices, and were to be accorded courtesy by all Thai people who saw them.[1]

In November 1960, when Laos was torn internally by armed conflict and faced difficulty externally with Thailand, ECAFE's good offices and arrangements were once more requested to enable the Committee members, the representatives of participating governments and UN officers to meet in Vientiane as scheduled. During the deliberations of this session under the chairmanship of the Executive

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1. Schaaf & Fifield, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

Secretary of ECAFE the two governments of Laos and Thailand negotiated a special agreement to provide a joint guarantee of security to Mekong Scheme teams (actually the Australian investigating team[1]) working at the Pa Mong damsite. The agreement offered armed protection by a team of mixed military personnel from both Laos and Thailand, who could fly the Lao, Thai and UN flags. The Prime Ministers of the two countries endorsed the agreement.[2]

In October 1961, Cambodia broke off diplomatic relations with Thailand over a border dispute. This time, the relations between the two countries were not restored until Prince Sihanouk was ousted from power in 1970. Cambodia also broke off its diplomatic relations with the Republic of Vietnam in August 1963, and the relations between the two countries were not restored until the change of leadership in Phnom Penh in March 1970. In spite of those severed diplomatic relations[3] the Mekong Committee has met regularly and many times in the four riparian capitals thanks to the "political nursing" and special arrangements of ECAFE.[4]

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1. The Australians, however, withdrew their investigating team because they felt that Colombo Plan civilian experts should not work where armed protection was needed.

2. Schaaf & Fifield, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

3. Cambodia also broke off its diplomatic relations with the United States which is the largest donor country of the Mekong Project.

4. As of February 1, 1971, fifty meetings have been held since the establishment of the Mekong Committee in 1957. The first Committee meeting was held on October 31, 1957, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

One wonders whether without ECAFE's auspices those meetings could have been held at all. As a matter of fact, Mr. Phlek Chatt, the member for Cambodia, told the writer in an interview in January 1971, in Vientiane, that under the Sihanouk regime he had some trouble with the Peking Embassy in Phnom Penh which objected to the arrival of the Taiwan delegation to attend the meeting of the Mekong Committee whenever it was held in the Cambodian capital. In view of the fact that Taiwan was a donor country and all donor countries were invited to participate in the work of the Committee, Mr. Phlek Chatt said that he replied to the Peking objection that it was not an invitation made by the government of Cambodia but an ECAFE "business." He also said that he gave orders to display the UN flags everywhere during the sessions.

In light of those events the ECAFE's political role appeared not only helpful but also necessary in many instances. It will certainly be needed for a long time until each individual riparian country can stand on its own feet economically, socially and politically and thus move toward regional cooperation and integration confidently, strongly and constructively without help from outside.

II.- The United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

The United Nations Development Program was the merger in 1966 of two separate bodies known as the Expanded Program for Technical Assistance (EPTA), launched in 1949, and the Special Fund created in 1959. EPTA provided experts and equipment for the underdeveloped countries whereas the

Special Fund concentrated on financing preparatory and "pre-investment" projects, and improving agricultural output in developing nations. The UNDP funds came exclusively from voluntary contributions. The United States has been the largest donor to UNDP and consistently pledged an amount equal to 40% of the total.

The UNDP/Special Fund has been involved in the Mekong Project since 1959. It has played a key administrative role and an effective economic role by providing "seed support" for the functioning of the Mekong Committee and the development of the Mekong Project. The UNDP/Special fund support has been of two kinds: 1/ institutional support to finance the secretariat and 2/ support for special projects, i.e. feasibility studies and investigation surveys.

The first form of support started in 1964 when the UNDP/Special Fund helped provide the Mekong Committee with its own secretariat[1] under the Institutional Support Project. The UNDP/Special Fund allocated $2,861,000[2] for a four-year project, from March 1, 1964 to February 29, 1968. When this Phase I of the UNDP Institutional Support Project expired, a second request was made by the Mekong Committee for a period of two and half years, from July 1, 1968 to December

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1. From 1958 to 1964, the Committee received assistance from the ECAFE Secretariat.

2. This amount included the equivalent of $248,000 in riparian governments' contributions toward local costs.

31, 1970.[1] This Phase II of the Project comprised a UNDP/Special Fund allocation of $3,117,400, of which the riparian governments' contributions toward local operating costs amounts to the equivalent of $241,300. Last year, it was announced at the 50th Plenary Session of the Mekong Committee in January 1971, in Vientiane, that the UNDP Institutional Support Project was extended to the Mekong Committee for another two-year period, from January 1, 1971 to December 31, 1972. The third phase of the Project involved a UNDP/Special Fund contribution of $2,333,500 to the four riparian governments. In 1971, UNDP contribution to the costs of the Mekong Secretariat amounted to 55% of the total.

The principal purpose of the UNDP Institutional Support Project has been institutional development, that is, the strengthening of the planning and organizational capacity of the Mekong Secretariat by expanding the Advisory Board and by training at all levels personnel of the four riparian countries, thereby laying the ground for the establishment of a permanent Mekong Secretariat staffed mostly by nationals of the riparian states.

At the end of 1971, professional staff in the Secretariat numbered 68. Of these 68 professional posts UNDP financed 51,and 36 came from the four riparian countries.

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1. The period March 1 - June 30, 1968 was bridged by savings from the previous project and from other assistance by UNDP.

On April 1, 1972, 9 riparian professional staff members were officially appointed to form the "Mekong Cadre," or the professional core of the Mekong Secretariat. The costs of the Mekong Cadre are to be borne partly by the UNDP Institutional Support Project and partly by the four riparians.

The second form of support was carried out in December 1959, when the Special Fund granted $1,326,700 for the survey and establishment of comprehensive feasibility reports in four large tributaries, one in each riparian country. The UNDP/Special Fund support also included the planning of experimental and demonstration farms in these four tributary projects. Three such farms were already in construction in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. It financed the mineral surveys in Northeast Thailand and Laos, the mathematical model of the Delta in Cambodia and Vietnam, and the hydrography survey of the river. In September 1968, the UNDP participated, by separate agreement, in the implementation of the Prek Thnot Project in Cambodia. It allocated some $810,000 in the form of a UNDP project to provide the final specification and designs for the irrigation system.

Lastly, in June 1971 the UNDP granted $1 million assistance for the identification and preparation of pioneer agricultural projects in the four Mekong countries. The pioneer agricultural program, a promising regional highlight of the Mekong Committee's works in the 1970's, was considered to provide a guide to the regional modernization of agriculture

throughout the Mekong Basin.

As of December 31, 1971, the total financial assistance pledged by UNDP amounted to $15,932,188. Perhaps more important than the nature and amount of financial support given by the UNDP/Special Fund to the Mekong Committee was "the impact of the Institutional Support Project" which, according to Mr. Van der Oord, "is catalytic, enabling the Mekong Committee to generate the support and participation of an ever-growing family of countries and agencies."[1]

III.- The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

The IBRD, or World Bank, was founded at the International Economic Conference held at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA, in July 1944, and began operation in June 1946. In 1971, its membership consists of 116 countries, each of which subscribes to the Bank's capital stock in accordance with its economic strength and nominates a Governor to the Bank Board of Governors. The Board meets once a year and has delegated most of its powers to 20 Executive Directors, consisting of six nominated Directors who represent the six largest stockholders in the Bank (The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan and India) and fifteen elected Directors chosen by the other member countries. The Chairman of the Executive Directors is also the President of World

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1. Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin, Semi-Annual Report: 1 January - 30 June, 1970, Note by the Acting Executive Agent, E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.311, 6 July 1970, p. 15.

Bank. As of June 1971, the total subscribed capital of the Bank was $23,871 million. By 1971, all four Mekong countries were members of the Bank.

The World Bank has recently emerged as a major channel for the transfer of resources to the developing world. Consequently it has become a rallying point for the four Mekong countries, the pivot for their needs in the seventies after other financial resources have been explored and exhausted. The unanimous appeal in 1970 from the four Mekong Committee members for a greater participation of the World Bank in the Lower Mekong Project expressed an urgent need to obtain not only financial and economic assistance but mainly the sponsorship and auspices of the World Bank which would give credibility and viability to the Project and accordingly encourage donor countries to invest in the Lower Mekong Scheme.

The original attitude of the World Bank toward the Mekong Project was characterized by skepticism and caution worthy of a well-established, and rich banker who does not want to gamble and risk his prestige and money, unless he is sure of the result. Up to 1969, the Bank's participation in the Mekong Project was informal, indirect, or even reluctant as in the Nam Ngum case.

The first interest of the World Bank in the Mekong Project was manifested in 1959 when the President of the IBRD proposed for the Mekong Committee's consideration the name of Mr. Arthur Karasz, the IBRD's Resident Representative

in Bangkok, as the Economist on the Committee's three member Advisory Board. The Committee accepted the offer in December 1959. Since then the World Bank continued its collaboration with the Mekong Project through contribution of Mr. Karasz and through discussions in Washington, New York and Bangkok, concerning the Special Fund tributaries Project, including the specification of the work to be done in each tributary. Apart from this consultant contribution there were no loans nor grants nor technical assistance made by the World Bank to the Mekong Committee.

A new development occurred at the twenty-third session of the Mekong Committee in Janaury 1964 when the Committee made some important policy statements regarding financial resources. The Committee affirmed the need to proceed from planning to investment and to obtain the necessary financial help through "some sort of pooled or consortium arrangement coordinated by the World Bank."[1]

At the twenty-fifth session of the Committee in September 1964, the World Bank was suggested for undertaking the formal administrative role in the implementation of the Nam Ngum project in Laos. In this regard the Mekong Committee specified that "as a departure from the normal Mekong Committee practice, the construction of the Nam Ngum project might be financed by grants rather than loans" and introduced

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1. Document E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.120, 20 March 1964, paragraph 7 and annexes 6-11.

the thought that "the World Bank might administer the finance and construction of the project though not advancing any World Bank proper or IDA loans."[1]

Subsequently, in October, the Committee requested the World Bank to undertake a desk study of the Nam Ngum. The Bank's report, completed in December, stated that it might be desirable from the point of view of the economically optimum timing of the project, to wait a half decade or so before considering the construction of the dam. For security reasons the World Bank has always favored small-scale projects and objected to the construction of big dams in the Mekong area.

Thus it was with great reluctance that the Bank agreed in 1965 to function as the Administrator of the Nam Ngum Funds, partly because of the pressure and appeal of the UN Secretary-General U Thant who was committed personally to the project. On March 4, 1966, the Nam Ngum Development Fund Agreement was signed by the World Bank, Laos, Thailand and seven cooperating countries. The terms of the Agreement provided for the establishment of a Special Fund to be administered separately by the Bank and which was constituted by the contributions of the cooperating countries (Article II), and for the obligations of the World Bank which, as Administrator, might manage the Fund according to its own

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1. Document E/CN.11/WRD/MKG/L.127, January 6, 1965, paragraph 9.11.

standard procedure, revenues or deposit being allocated to the Fund and the Bank receiving no compensation for its administration (Art. VIII).

In 1969, although not departing from its cautious approach, the World Bank changed its attitude toward the Mekong Project. In response to the April 1969 letter from UN Secretary-General U Thant to World Bank President McNamara asking for a greater participation of the IBRD in the whole effort for the development of the Lower Mekong Basin, the World Bank undertook a two-year review (1969... 1971) of the effectiveness of Mekong Basin planning (including the Indicative Basin Plan) and projects readiness. The result of this two-year review has led to "identification of a group of agricultural pioneer projects for which further pre-investment studies are considered justified."[1] In April 1971, at the ECAFE annual meeting in Manila, the World Bank agreed to the request of the Mekong Committee, the UNDP and the four donor governments (Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States contributing altogether half the $2 million cost) to serve as "executing agency" for the pioneers projects, working in close association with the FAO and ADB.

The Pioneer projects mark the first important step of specific World Bank roles in the Lower Mekong Scheme. The

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1. World Bank International Development Association, Annual Report 1971, p. 30.

World Bank agreed to provide technical assistance in the identification and preparation of studies which can form the basis for future investment programs. In its capacity as executing agency for the UNDP, "the major source finance for technical assistance in the UN family," the World Bank contributes to the Basin planning approach by identifying studies through economic missions which visit the Mekong countries at regular intervals. The Bank has appointed Mr. Mohammed Shoaib, Vice-President of the IBRD, as its Special Representative for Mekong Affairs. It has also stationed a technical liaison officer in Bangkok to coordinate the Bank's involvement in the Mekong activities.

This new phase of the World Bank involvement has given the Mekong project a new regional aspect and interest. The pioneer projects, unlike the tributary dams, are basin-wide and carried out in all four countries and should provide regional solutions to basic agricultural problems common to the four riparian states which still remain largely agricultural societies.

Furthermore, the Bank's qualified endorsement of the Project would encourage riparian members to cooperate more closely and seek financial assistance from donor governments. The Bank does not give any grants or loans to the Mekong Committee for technical and legal reasons, since the Committee as such is not a member of the Bank. However, the Bank has expressed its willingness to play two future possible roles: first, as administrator of Funds a la Nam

Ngum for other projects in the Mekong Basin, if requested, and second, as Executing Agency for specific and narrowly defined projects, if so requested. These two possible roles of the Bank alone could be a catalytic force for the process of Mekong regional cooperation in the 1970's.

IV.- The Asian Development Bank (ADB)

The Asian Development Bank was first formally proposed by an expert group on regional economic cooperation appointed by ECAFE. The proposal was endorsed by the first Ministerial conference on Asian Economic Cooperation held under ECAFE auspices in December 1963. The agreement establishing ADB was signed at a Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Manila in December 1965, and entered into force in August 1966. The Asian Development Bank commenced operation on December 19, 1966. Its membership includes all members and associate members of ECAFE and is open to other regional countries and non-regional developed countries which are members of the United Nations or its specialized agencies. As of June 1971, the ADB had 36 members, of which 22 come from the region. North Vietnam, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China were not members. Burma, Iran and Outer Mongolia, although members of the United Nations, did not join the ADB. The USSR decided to stay away after participating in earlier discussions leading to the establishment of the Bank. France became a member in 1970. Originally fixed at $1,000 million the ADB's capital was increased to $1,100 million in November 1966 and rose

to $2,750 million in 1971. The United States and Japan are the Bank's largest shareholders, each subscribing $200 million to its capital. Like the IBRD, the structure of the ADB consists of a Board of Governors, a ten-member Board of Directors and a President who is elected by the Board of Governors for a five-year term and is subject to reelection.

The Asian Development Bank proposed to play an active role in regional development and cooperation. The Bank's regional roles were stated in Article 2 of the ADB Charter which emphasized the need:

1/ "To utilize the resources at (the Bank's) disposal for financing (the) development of the developing member countries in the region, giving priority to those regional, sub-regional, as well as national projects and programs which will contribute most effectively to the harmonious growth of the region as a whole...;" and

2/ "To meet the requests from members in the region to assist them in the coordination of their development policies and plans (for) achieving better utilization of their resources, making their economies more complementary, and promoting the orderly expansion of their (intra-regional) trade..."

According to Mr. Takeshi Watanabe, president of the ADB, these functions also stemmed from the Bank's overall aim

"to foster economic growth and cooperation in...Asia and the Far East and to...accelerate the economic development of the developing member countries in the region collectively and individually."[1]

In practice, however, the ADB took a very cautious approach in searching for and in financing multinational projects. In its 1967 annual report, the Bank realized that:

> "with regard to intra-regional cooperation, there were opportunities as well as complexities in a regionalized approach to financing operations but that the national development projects may in itself promote, in due course, the economic growth of the region as a whole."[2]

The difficulties of the ADB derived partly from its limited budget and partly from the heterogeneity of social, economic and political conditions in Asia. As Mr. Takeshi Watanabe acknowledged himself, "Asia still has to reach the stage where regional objectives can correct the economic myopia often ascribed to emerging nationalism."[3]

Accordingly, the ADB approach to the development of the Lower Mekong Basin has been cautious and slow. The ADB assistance to the Mekong Committee has been very limited. One of the problems faced by the ADB in its leading activities in the Mekong region as a whole was that the Mekong

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1. Takeshi Watanabe, "Cooperation - The Catalytic Force," The Asia Magazine, September 29, 1968, p. 25.
2. ADB, Annual Report, 1967, p. 17.
3. Takeshi Watanabe, ibid.

Committee as such is not a member of the Bank.[1] Another problem dealt with the financial resources of the ADB which are rather meager compared to what a ADB official described as a "huge potential development program involving four countries and many sectors of their economies" and will take "years and years of effort and billions and billions of dollars, to carry forward."

Despite difficulties, the ADB has taken a "positive interest" in the Mekong Project, and since 1968, has undertaken some financing and technical assistance projects which will contribute toward the development of the Lower Mekong basin.

In Khmer Republic, the Bank gave, in 1970, a concessional loan and a technical assistance grant to help strengthen the electric power supply system in the Phnom Penh area.

In Laos, the Bank has been involved in three technical assistance and two concessional financial projects. In 1969, a ADB-financed technical assistance team prepared the Integrated Agricultural Development Program for the Vientiane Plain. The following year the Bank made a loan and a technical assistance grant for the development of the 800 ha at Tha Ngon development area. In May 1971, the ADB provided a concessional loan to carry out the Vientiane Power distribution Project. In January of the same year,

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1. Same problem encountered by the World Bank.

the ADB agreed to undertake an evaluation of the Vientiane-Nong Khai bridge, at the requests of the two governments of Laos and Thailand.

In Thailand, through an extended program of technical assistance, the ADB has assisted the Thai Office of Accelerated Rural Development in the identification, planning and implementation of productive activities in North and North-east Thailand. Also, under the terms of a technical assistance agreement signed in January 1970 between the ADB and the Thai government, a nine-man team began work in March on a study of the development needs and potentials of a 10,000 ha. irrigable area within the Nam Pong (Nong Wai) irrigation project.

Recently, ADB Vice-President C.S. Krishna Moorthi signed, on behalf of the ADB, a Memorandum of Understanding relating to the UNDP - financed Agricultural pioneer projects. The Memorandum, co-signed by ADB, UNDP, IBRD and the Mekong Committee, provides that preparatory studies are taken up by the ADB after mutual consultations with all parties concerned, and the main functions of Executing Agent will be delegated to the ADB by the IBRD.

The ADB Quarterly Newsletter of October 1971, after reporting the diverse activities of the ADB in the Mekong region, concluded on this note:

> "It is expected that the technical assistance projects undertaken by the Bank in the countries concerned and multi-lateral discussions now under way will result in additional Bank lending to development in the Mekong region."

The limited resources of ADB can hardly substitute for bilateral assistance and aid from other donor governments and international organizations. Nevertheless, through its technical assistance and financing programs, the ADB could act as a catalyst for economic development in the Mekong Basin. Its technical assistance activities could help to identify sound projects that might be proposed for financing by other external agencies. The Bank could also convene consortia of lenders for projects too large for a single donor to finance.[1] Moreover, the Bank itself, as a training ground for Asians "will help to raise a generation of Asians on the idea of regionalism, and enable them to take the lead in the implementation of regional projects and plans for harmonious economic growth,"[2] as the President of the Asian Development Bank confidently wrote in 1968.

If anything, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank will play in the future the instrumental political role in holding the four countries together after the United States moves out of the region, the People's Republic of China moves in the World Organization and its specialized agencies, the Soviet Union moves around the South Asian periphery, and Japan moves down to its Southeast Asian neighbors. This political role in itself is important for regional cooperation to evolve and must not be discounted.

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1. Manmohan Singh, "Regional Development Banks," International Conciliation, January 1970, No. 576, p. 56.

2. Takeshi Watanabe, art. cit., p. 27.

Conclusion

Since the establishment of the Mekong Committee in 1957 the Mekong region has suffered many transformations and vicissitudes. Cambodia, Laos and the Republic of Vietnam each had to face a number of coups or threats of coups, fight guerrrilla or conventional wars, cope with economic inflation and disruption and grapple with social problems of refugees and land reform. Thailand, the most stable nation among the four riparians, also underwent a political change last year, when the National Executive Council took over and closed down the Senate and the House, at least momentarily. On the whole, the Lower Mekong valley has remained an arena of great uncertainties, chronic disarray and profound changes.

In the midst of those political changes, social convulsions, economic crises, military operations in each of the four Mekong countries, and in spite of divisive factors and severed diplomatic relations between them at various times, the Mekong Committee alone stands firm and intact in its membership. In fact, of all Southeast Asian regional organizations with indigenous membership the Mekong Committee has the longest life - fifteen years old - and constitutes a rare example of regional cooperation in the world history of water resources development in general, and in Southeast Asia in particular.

In this concluding chapter we will assess the success of the Mekong Committee in the light of our findings and

analysis, draw some tentative generalizations on the process of regional cooperation and suggest some theoretical propositions which need further research and study.

I.- Evaluation of Mekong Regional Cooperation

The process of regional cooperation depends upon both intraregional factors and exogeneous forces, which we tried to analyze in Parts II and III. From our findings and analysis we can fairly draw a double conclusion. The first is that the exogeneous forces, particularly ECAFE, UNDP, IBRD and ADB, the United States and Japan, are not only the most salient factors of Mekong regional cooperation, but also a sine qua non condition for its initiation and development. The second important conclusion is that intraregional incentives for cooperation among the four Mekong states are minimal, subordinated to, and conditioned by, those external catalytic agents.

Before we evaluate the success of Mekong regional cooperation, its nature and its scope, let us first elaborate on the foregoing double conclusion.

A/ Exogeneous Forces

The Mekong case study is a clear illustration of the predominant and necessary roles played by international organizations and great powers in fostering regional cooperation. The Mekong Project would not have come about had it not been undertaken under the aegis of the UN regional Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, or ECAFE. It would not have survived had it not been for the

attraction of foreign capital and technical assistance. Two thirds of the operational resources of the Mekong Committee have come from different countries and agencies outside the Mekong Basin. It may be possible that the four states of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam would not have cooperated as much as they have had there not been the American political influence and umbrella and Japanese economic interests in this region during the fifties and sixties.

To begin with, the UN ECAFE is unmistakably the prime mover responsible for the fifteen-year Mekong regional cooperation. Its international status, its neutral position, and its non-politically motivated interest succeeded in bringing the four riparian countries together more than any single great power could, as pointed out in Chapter III. The determinant role played by ECAFE at the formation of the Mekong Committee can still be found in the first sentence of the Committee's Statute which states:

> "The Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin is established by the Governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam, in response to the decisions taken by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East at its thirteenth session."[1]

Likewise, ECAFE's neutrality later transformed the UN regional commission into an able and respected mediator

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1. Emphasis added by the writer.

and diplomatic broker, when Cambodia broke relations with Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam over some border disputes at various times in the late fifties and early sixties. In each of those instances ECAFE successfully overcame all the difficulties caused by strained relationships between riparian governments and thereby prevented the Mekong Committee from collapsing.

When we recall that boundary and territorial disputes among neighboring states killed quite a few regional organizations, such as ASA and MAPHILINDO, we shoudl give full credit to ECAFE for bringing the four Mekong countries together and especially keeping them together, which is a more difficult task. ECAFE has thus helped develop a sense of common regional purpose, commitment and responsiveness of the four riparian countries, despite their differences and hostilities.

The UNDP role is more technical and financial but equally significant. The UNDP effort and contribution proved the importance of external resources and capacities in the process of regional cooperation. Moreover, the UNDP authority and expertise has encouraged many donor governments and international and private agencies to invest in the Mekong Project.

The World Bank and Asian Development Bank have maintained a low profile in the Project. But as we noted in Chapter VIII, the four members of the Mekong Committee consistently and unanimously called for a greater

involvement of these two financing organizations. Unquestionably, their tremendous financial power, technical resources and international prestige would provide an increasingly catalytic effect on the process of Mekong regional cooperation in the future, when the time comes to build the mainstream dams, like Pa Mong.

The two remaining external catalytic agents are the United States and Japan. Their conceptions and attitudes toward Southeast Asian regional cooperation in general, and their roles and participation in the Mekong Project in particular, were already studied in Chapters VI and VII. Suffice it to say that without the US initiative and proposal for an ambitious program of regional development in Southeast Asia, which was so forcefully stressed in the Presidential Johns Hopkins Speech and subsequently endorsed by Japan, the Mekong Committee would probably not enter into the construction stage of tributary dams and Laos would certainly not get its $20 million Nam Ngum dam.

Significantly, the process of Mekong regional cooperation reached its highest points during 1965-1968, when the US thrust and involvement in this region grew stronger and firmer in all aspects - military, political and economic. President Johnson's Johns Hopkins Speech gave a great impetus and stimulus to the process of Mekong regional cooperation and enhanced cooperation among riparians, donor countries, international institutions and private agencies at that time.

The second convergence between exogeneous powers and regional states is more subtle and less conspicuous. The Mekong region is strategically situated South of Communist China. To counterbalance this big power the four small states of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam needed the United States which was at that time the only great power to fill the vacuum left by the French in this region and provide necessary leadership and technical, economic and financial assistance for the development of the Mekong river.

The fear of Chinese domination produced two different reactions among the small Mekong states: either a pro-American alignment (Thailand and the Republic of Vietnam) or a neutrality policy (Laos and Cambodia). But in either case the US presence and umbrella were not incompatible with regional political orientations and forces of the Lower Mekong Valley. Thus in an effort to reconcile both the riparian policy not to alienate China and the riparian need for US assistance, the Mekong Committee was established officially under the auspices of ECAFE but effectively supported and sponsored by the United States. This formula proved to be healthy and successful for the Mekong river development.

All in all, the relationship between the exogeneous forces and regional politics in the Mekong Basin was coherent and consistent with a world system characterized by the bipolar East-West Struggle.

Finally, it is not enough to observe that ECAFE, UNDP, IBRD, ADB, the United States and Japan has each assumed a different catalytic role in Mekong regional cooperation. We should also emphasize the convergence of these exogeneous forces, which really holds the key answer to the success of Mekong regional cooperation up to 1970. Indeed, what matters is not only the roles of ECAFE or the United States as regional promoters per se, but also the convergence between them, between the international organizations involved and the great powers concerned, between exogeneous and regional forces.

The convergence of different exogeneous forces did exist in the Mekong case during the period under study. When the Mekong Committee was set up in 1957, the United Nations was operating under the leadership and influence of the United States. The UNDP and ECAFE, to a lesser extent, depended upon US financial contribution and assistance. The World Bank and ADB were equally under the American sponsorship. The ADB, in particular, was established in 1965 as a direct result of the Johns Hopkins Speech, with a special help from President Johnson and a vigorous support from Premier Sato of Japan.

In other words, on the whole the international organizations involved and the two Western Pacific Powers concerned worked hand in hand, or in concerted action , in the Mekong Project, notwithstanding a few minor conflicts between them at the initiating stage.

B/ Intraregional Incentives for Cooperation

Regional incentives for cooperation among the four Mekong states are not lacking. However, their degree of compellingness is minimal. Among the positive factors calling for cooperation we can cite the Mekong river itself which inextricably ties the four riparian nations together, the sense of regional interdependence related to international water resources development, the notion of mutual benefits, whether they are actual or potential and the mutual liking of the Mekong members.

There are also other factors which require Mekong regional cooperation, such as the siege mentality in period of stress, fear of great power dominance, and need for external assistance. We call them "negative factors" because they constitute essentially a reaction against a situation or a condition.

All those factors were analyzed in Part II. What is interesting to note is that the positive factors have a very low degree of compellingness in Mekong regional cooperation. The four riparian members perceived their cooperation and interdependence mostly in "physical", that is, technical, terms, due to the Mekong river itself. Benefits were unevenly distributed and differently appreciated. They were more potential than actual for Cambodia and the Republic of Vietnam. Only the mutual liking, understanding and respect of the Mekong Committee members could be fairly rated high. An yet this last factor is not

positively stable because the Committee members were often frustrated in their "dreams" by politicians, or the real-politik, and subordinated to their respective governments. After all, the Mekong Committee, whose ultimate decision-making comes from separate and diverse political entities, is a political body in the truest sense, even if the representatives regard themselves as technocrats dealing with matters of technical, economic and social cooperation.

On the other hand, the negative factors in Mekong regional cooperation are "compelled" by necessity to raise up, or level up, with external requirements. For example, the Mekong Committee members had to show off their strong regional solidarity to get financial and technical assistance from international agencies, financing institutions and donor governments. They were equally united when they were attacked or endangered by external threats, such as the US withdrawal from the Prek Thnot project in Cambodia in 1966, or the Communist attack on the Phnom Penh airport on the eve of the Plenary Session of the Committee in January 1971.

In sum, as stated earlier, the intraregional incentives for cooperation among the four Mekong states are minimal, subordinated to, and conditioned by, external factors and forces.

C/ Nature and Scope of Mekong Regional Cooperation

The evaluation of the success, or failure, of regional cooperation calls for specific criteria which must be

different from those used to assess regional integration. Since regional cooperation is not the formation of a "political community" but simply and primarily a means, or "any interstate activity," to meet some common regional and national needs, the first measure of success will be the number of concrete activities of interstate cooperative enterprises and positive achievements.

The second step will be to link to these activities and achievements observations concerning institutional evolution. Institution-building is the most critical test of regional cooperation, indeed. It is not enough to hold meetings, undertake field surveys, or build dams. "The object," as Mr. Basu aptly put it, "is to create a dynamic framework within which the whole process of development can evolve."[1] Regional institutionalization could be considered as the "take-off" stage of regional cooperation process.

Lastly, since regional cooperation is viewed as an instrumental policy or strategy to achieve national and regional development, other criteria to appraise its success would be to measure the increase in GNP and standards of living in the countries involved, the acceleration of

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1. Basu, R.K., "Some Aspects of Organization, Administration and Financial Resources in the Development of the Lower Mekong Basin," Indian Journal of Power and River Valley Development , 1966, p. 71.

modernization and industrialization, the improvement of trade and exchanges within the region, or other specific economic indicators.

Since this study focuses mainly on the political and diplomatic aspects of regional cooperation process, we are more concerned about the political, national and regional development than the economic modernization in the Mekong Basin. Thus, our third criterion of evaluation will be to assess the Mekong regional cooperation as a policy or strategy to achieve political security and stability in this region in general, and as a US arm of diplomacy to achieve a settlement to the Vietnam war, in particular.

The first yardstick of evaluation is easy and must not present any difficulty in research. It deals with concrete activities and positive achievements undertaken by the Mekong Committee since its inception. In this regard, the Committee has been active and productive as well. The impressive record of Mekong regional activities and concrete results scored the success of Mekong regional cooperation.

From 1957 to 1971, the Mekong Committee held over fifty meetings, that is, an average of three to four meetings a year. It organized a dozen important regional seminars on engineering, navigation, economic and social studies, legal and administrative problems, and the Draft Amplified Basin Plan Report. It instituted a number of training courses for riparian officials and future riparian professionals.

The Mekong Committee was equally interested in research

and study. It sponsored many surveys and studies dealing with a wide variety of topics: fishery development, environmental problems, domestic power markets, Mekong manpower and educational needs, and even public health measures. The Mekong research material on technical, economic and social issues and subjects relevant to the development of the Mekong river is extraordinarily rich. The Mekong Documentation Centre in Bangkok contains tons of papers, proceedings, reports, documents, maps, monthly bulletins, yearbooks, periodicals and books.

More importantly, the Mekong Committee assumed some legal responsibilities. It signed nineteen tax-exemption agreements with third states in respect of technical assistance services and supplies as well as numerous bilateral and multilateral technical assistance project agreements. It also made a few policy decisions relating to the control of low water discharge in 1957 and to navigation in 1964.

Perhaps, the most significant legal documents in the history of Mekong regional cooperation are those which were signed between the riparian members themselves. The first regional legal agreement occurred in August 1965, when the four riparian representatives signed the Convention for the Supply of Power between Laos and Thailand. The second set of legal instruments dealt with the Protocol co-signed by Cambodia and Vietnam in March 1966, endorsing the terms of The Nam Ngum Development Fund Agreement signed by Laos and Thailand and other donor countries the same month. Another

legal agreement was signed by Thailand and Laos and endorsed by Cambodia and Vietnam in January 1969. It pertained to the Supply by Laos of Rock to Thailand for the Construction of the Lam Dom Noi Dam Project. All those agreements were binding decisions which enhanced cooperation among the four Mekong states.

In addition to those diverse tasks, the Mekong Committee accomplished positive and concrete results: eight tributary dams were completed, eight under construction, and eight others under investigation.

In sum, in terms of intraregional activities and concrete results the Mekong regional cooperation was a commendable success, if we should take into consideration the political, diplomatic and military hurdles which plagued and severed relations between the four riparian states at various times.

The second and further step to measure the success of Mekong regional cooperation will be to link those quantitative results to a qualitative institutional evolution. Here the progress of the Mekong Committee is less consistent and less meaningful. On one hand, the Committee was the only regional organization in Southeast Asia with authority to raise funds, sign agreements with donor countries, mobilize international technical assistance and approve programs for implementation.

On the other hand, the Mekong Committee was not intended to be a supranational institution and has not evolved in

that direction. At best it was a regional intergovernmental organization endowed with specific functions and some decision-making power. At worst it was a loose gathering of four separate and sovereign entities without anything in common except the Mekong river.

On the whole, the institutional evolution of the Mekong Committee was not commensurate with its activities and achievements. In spite of its expanding tasks, the Mekong Committee of 1972 remains much the same as that of 1957. It is an intergovernmental body represented by four riparian members, which does not possess its own budget, its autonomous and indigenous Secretariat and its own intrinsic and binding decision-making power.

The reason - and the consequence as well - is that the nature of Mekong regional cooperation was mainly technical and the scope of achievements mostly national. The Committee's agreements and policy decisions dealt largely with technical questions, such as navigation or control of low water discharge, and only tributary projects of national concern and responsibility have been developed. The pattern of Mekong cooperation for decisions with respect to investigation survey and tributary dam construction has not spilled over into decision-making with respect to regional problems and development. Mainstream projects still remain at the level of investigatory and planning functions of the Mekong Committee.

At this stage, mainstream projects could not materialize

and cooperation among the four countries could not progress if there were no institutional expansion of the Mekong Committee itself, as warned by Mr. Wolwend:

> "When the development of the Basin effectively enters its operational phase - that is to say international project construction, operation and maintenance -, its terms of reference will have to be considerably broadened and expanded and, should the Committee member-countries wish to pursue joint development to that extent, their participation will entail important and sometimes far-reaching new commitments on their part."[1]

Mekong regional institutionalization will not simply include an amendment of the outdated Statute and a broadening of the powers and functions of the existing Mekong Committee. It will essentially depend upon the willingness of the four Mekong countries together to:

- Join in a common stragegy of regional development,
- Formulate their national plans within a regional framework,
- Participate in common facilities for training, research, production, marketing and transportation,
- Pool limited skills and capital and specialize in commonly agreed upon industries, and
- Operated, staff and finance a central organism and subsidiary regional and national bodies.[2]

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1. Wolwend, B.J., Legal Aspects of Lower Mekong Basin Development, WRD/MKG/INF/L.313/Rev.1, 15 September 1969, p. 55.

2. Young, Kenneth T., The Southeast Asia Crisis, The Eighth Hammarskjold Forum, Oceana Publications, 1966, p. 153.

The Mekong Committee members used to describe their cooperation as a treasure chest with four locks and four keys, and which could only be opened by the four members using each hisown key to open his own lock. The future challenging task for the Committee members will be to use their willingness, imagination and energy to find and forge only one (regional) key which can open all four (national) locks.

Then - and only then - could Mekong regional cooperation be said to have all its significance, value and weight. Cooperation among riparian states will not only concentrate on national benefits or technical issues, but will also involve some sacrifice of the right of sovereign members to determine their own development policies.

Our last attempt of evaluation is to assess the Mekong regional cooperation as an instrumental policy to bring about political security and stability in the region, and as a US diplomatic strategy to achieve a settlement in Vietnam, as expressed in the Johns Hopkins Speech. How successful was this policy?

Obviously, the Mekong strategy failed to solve the political problems of the region. The Mekong Basin does not look better politically today than fifteen years ago. Political instability, insecurity and unpredictability still prevail in each of the four Mekong countries. Moreover, it is argued with good reason that political strains and constraints slowed down the work of the Mekong Committee and impaired the process of regional cooperation.

Technocrats and functionalists who had thought in 1957 that the Mekong undertaking would be "the road to security," to use Mitrany's book title, found in 1971 that their efforts to build that road were often obstructed by political contingencies, and that the ways and means to build it were hardly determined by technical expertise alone. Ultimately, they will depend upon political decisions and actions. Dr. Binson, a Mekong believer since 1957, told the writer in Janaury 1971 that "the construction of the Pa Mong mainstream project will depend upon peace in Vietnam." I would not disagree with this statement. Pa Mong depends upon peace in Vietnam and not peace in Vietnam upon Pa Mong.

Likewise, the Mekong regional development as a constructive peaceful alternative to a military strategy in support of US foreign policy in mainland Southeast Asia failed to bring about a settlement of the Vietnam war. However, I would not deny or dismiss the diplomatic significance of the 1965 US presidential Mekong proposal and the opportunities it potentially offered, as already examined in Chapter VII.

The question remains as to whether the Mekong proposal amounted to more than a diplomatic maneuver toward a short-range objective, such as the appeasement of war critics in the United States and abroad. Or does the Mekong proposal offer a means toward a more acceptable pattern of diplomatic relationships over the longrange future?

If the Mekong concept, which blends the chiefs elements

of national development, regional cooperation and international assistance could serve as an international strategy for peace, many problems and issues should be explored. Among them two are of overriding concern: the timing and diplomatic opportunities. Might the Mekong proposal have served a broader and more decisive diplomatic purpose under more favorable circumstances and timing? What potential diplomatic opportunities are offered by regional cooperation and undertaking? Under what circumstances might regional development and cooperation afford an alternative to conflict and can the factor of timeliness in adopting this alternative be determined and exploited?

The conclusion of the Mekong case study is that the initiation and development of regional cooperation process depended primarily upon exogeneous factors, that is, international cooperation and assistance, and great power participation and influence. Accordingly, it is likely that the future prospects of Mekong regional cooperation will largely be determined by those same factors, especially the thrusts and interactions of the four big powers in this region in the seventies.

In the past, the Soviet Union, a member of ECAFE, did not oppose but did not support the Mekong Project either. The People's Republic of China, while strongly denouncing all Asian regional organization, such as SEATO, ASEAN, ASPAC and ADB, as instruments of the United States to encircle Mainland China, has never attacked the Mekong Committee. This

might leave room for maneuver and hope for a true and genuine Mekong regional cooperation embracing all riparian countries. This will certainly include China, Burma, and perhaps North Vietnam, which is a non-riparian but whose cooperation would make the development of this region more realistic politically, more "bankable" economically and more manageable socially.

The Mekong concept did not succeed to make peace and produce political stability in this region. However, the Mekong Committee itself has demonstrated fifteen years of continuity, stability and growth. It has shown extraordinary resilience under trying circumstances. The Mekong scheme has proved that opportunities for regional cooperation existed among differing states. Given its great potentialities, the Mekong regional cooperation would probably be the first powerful and hopeful unifying factor which could help maintain peace and order,and promote development and prosperity in the Mekong Valley in the post-war Vietnam period. To paraphrase the late Kenneth Young, peace-keeping and region-building in a divided world need visionary dimensions. The majestic Mekong River has them.

II.- Tentative Generalizations

From the above findings and analysis a number of tentative generalizations can be made about the exogeneous factors, intraregional variables, and relationships between economics and politics in the process of regional cooperation.

A/ Exogeneous Factors

The Mekong case corroborates Professor Kaiser's contention that the roles of great powers in regionalism are by no means marginal or perfunctory, and bears out the thesis - already substantiated by Cockran's Carribean study and Gordon's ASEAN example - that the exogeneous forces constitute the most salient factors in regional cooperation among small and developing nations and directly or indirectly hold the key answer to its success. Effectively, the findings of Part III and the conclusion of this study point up the fact that external catalytic agents weighed heavily on the process of Mekong regional cooperation.

B/ Intraregional Variables

a/ Limited Function and Low Cost: there is some evidence that at the beginning of the regionalization process, the more we can separate out purely technical and economic projects or problems from the political, the sounder the regional organization will be in its, say, first ten years. Low costs of a regional organization are probably an important factor that we should look at in terms of this approach. Low political costs as well as low costs of personnel and other resource input would make regional cooperation more attractive. The grandiose project among two or three countries may cause more difficulties and should be avoided, especially if it seems to take away the sovereignty of a country or the freedom of action of the leaders, particularly in developing countries or where there is a rapid turnover of leadership. The Mekong experience showed that

we should start small rather than grandiose. In spite of the tremendous potentialities of the Mekong Project, the functions and powers of the Mekong Committee were very limited and narrowly defined in 1957. It was only a "Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin."

b/ The most lasting kinds of cooperative efforts tend to be related to very narrow and apolitical functions.

c/ National Interests: they should not be overlooked in any cooperative undertaking. Whether they are political or economic, actual or potential, national interests are basic propellers of regional cooperation process. The problem is not to deny national interests of different members but to reconcile them with regional interests.

d/ Consequently, the notion and perception of benefits are very important. They account for cooperation or conflict among participating members. To promote cooperation benefits must follow the two principles of additionality and mutuality. Additionality means that a regional project would be acceptable to the regional state only if the project did not injure any national interest but added economic strength or fulfillment. Mutuality means that benefits must be shared, or distributed, equally and evenly among cooperating members.

e/ Structural Flexibility: It is better to develop a habit and spirit of cooperation first, before building a regional institution. The former would form a solid foundation of mutual trust and understanding without which regional cooperation could not possibly evolve. Thus,

structural flexibility is advised at the beginning of regional cooperation process, because preoccupation with formality and procedure may block perception of the instrumental role of structure as a device for fusing idiosyncratic substantive demands with communally shared domaines of experience.[1] Also, structural arrangements should be changed so as to more fully serve the needs of emergent regional identity assertions.

C/ Relationship between Economics and Politics

Asian experiences of regional cooperation seem to denote that the relationship between economics and politics is not a simple unilinear continuum, but a complicated interaction system, as illustrated by the Mekong case. This does not mean a total rejection of Functionalism but only its "spill-over" theory. Cooperation does exist in non-controversial apolitical fields of international and regional relations. However, technical or economic cooperation does not necessarily lead to political cooperation.

In the final analysis, it is fruitless to try to separate economics and politics, especially in developing

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1. In his Patterns of International Cooperation in the Carribbeans, Cokran made the same observation:

> "The Carribbean Organization broke down mainly because it was a formal structure paralyzed by protocol that sprang from a bewildering array of governmental forms." (p. 151).

countries where structural differentiation is not a very distinctive feature. The making of an economic decision by a government is after all an act of politics , and economic conditions and possibilities often determine the boundaries within which political decisions can be made.

This leads us to the following conclusion drawn by Hiroshi Kitamuri in his appraisal of the past records of regional cooperation in Asia:

> "The ultimate determinants for the success or lack thereof of regional cooperation have to be sought in the nature of national decision-making processes. In other words, the pace of advance will largely depend on the extent to which the economic rationale of regional cooperation, consistent with national interests, is reflected in the decisions made by national policy-makers."[1]

In sum, a successful regional cooperation for development needs a certain degree of political agreement among the highest level decision-makers.

III.- Research Propositions

A/ Exogeneous Forces:

The roles of great powers, their interplay and impact on the process of regional cooperation and integration have been the subject of many controversies and need further research. All regional organizations set up after World War II

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1. Hiroshi Kitamura, "Regional Cooperation as Seen from ECAFE," a paper presented at the SEADAG Regional Development Panel Seminar held at the Asia House, New York, on December 10-11, 1971.

did not take place in "an international vacuum"[1] and reckoned mainly on "exchange programs and foreign aid as the basis for cooperation."[2] The European Economic Community was a case in point. In developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America the importance of great powers in fostering regional cooperation and integration processes was commonly accepted by both practitioners and theorists of regionalism.

Yet the roles of great powers in promoting regional co-operation and integration have given rise to many misgivings and controversies among scholars. Misgivings pertain to their interests, attitudes, policies and influences, as noted by Professors Cantori and Spiegel:

> "External powers can serve to intensify or reduce the level of conflict of subordinate systems. Their presence may encourage divisions or integrations among the nation-states of these areas. External powers may promote regional associations as a means of extending their control or of aiding the economic development of the indigenous states. On the other hand, their presence may limit regional cohesive-ness and produce fissiparous tendencies."[3]

Controversies deal with the question as to whether regional cooperation and integration processes are easier to evolve in a bipolar or multipolar international political

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1. Nye, Joseph, ed., International Regionalism, Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1968, p. 414.

2. Cantori & Spiegel, The International Politics of Regions, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970, p. 344.

3. Ibid., p. 37.

system. Balance-of-power theorists argued that a multipolar distribution of power maintained world stability.[1] Others, like Raymond Aron, Stanley Hoffman and Kenneth Waltz, contended that bipolar international systems were more stable than multipolar systems.[2]

Likewise, there has been an attempt to determine the effects of distribution of world power on a regional subsystem and replace regional organizations in their global context.[3] Professor Bernard Gordon, an Asian regionalist, believed in the multipolar stability and urged the United States to "encourage Asian regionalism" because "it will help establish an added power center in Asia," loose a dangerous tight "bipolar Asia" which could lead to a conflict with China, and create a "multipolar Asian structure" similar to the balance-of-power system which existed before World War I and which "did in fact provide for security and stability in East Asia."[4]

The Mekong case seems to indicate that regional cooperation among the four riparian states was facilitated by

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1. Morgenthau, Hans, Politics Among Nations; Kaplan, Morton, System & Process in International Politics; Rosenau, J., International Aspects of Civil Strife; Liska, George, International Equilibrium.

2. Aron, "The Quest for a Philosophy of Foreign Affairs," in Contemporary Theory in International Relations, edited by Hoffman; Waltz, K., "Stability of the Bipolar System," Daedelus, XCIII, Summer 1964.

3. See Kaiser, Liska, Oran Young and Micahel Brecher.

4. Gordon, B.K., op. cit., Chapter V, pp. 59-72.

the world bipolar confrontation and the convergence between regional politics and international politics in this particular area. The political rationale for Mekong regional cooperation was well understood and well defined by all the parties concerned. What will happen to the process of Mekong regional cooperation in the multipolarity system in the seventies? The future prospects of Mekong regional cooperation are uncertain, because new actors will be involved and the game will have to change its rules.

In any event, to undertake a meaningful comparative approach of Asian regional cooperation we need to look into the following issues:

a/ The great power thrusts and interplays in Asia

b/ The great power interests, objectives and policies in Asian regional cooperation

c/ The interaction between the global international system and the regional or subregional system.

B/ Intraregional Variables

a/ Perceptions and attitudes of riparian elites toward regional cooperation must be explored in depth.

b/ The so-called "riparianization process," or growing riparian participation in financial contribution and manpower, needs further research and study. Does it exist a regional civil service as such? What are the psycho-political attributes of this regional civil service?

c/ The Asian style of negotiation, diplomacy and conflict

settlement is still a mystery. A better knowledge would help us understand the difficult process of regional co-operation and conflict resolution more fully.

C/ Relationship between Economics and Politics

a/ Since this relationship is not a simple unilinear continuum, we should carefully examine the composition of the political elite and the business leading groups and their interaction, or inter-marriage.

b/ Secondly, is there a techno-political osmosis in the governmental decision-making process?

c/ Finally, since a successful regional cooperation ultimately depends upon political decisions made by national decision-makers, it is important to know whether regional cooperation is viewed as a dependent or independent factor of over-all foreign policy and its priority in foreign policy making.

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